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Mr Lewis Atterbury



46  
[5029] LETTERS

CONCERNING THE  
CONSTITUTION AND ORDER  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN MINISTRY,  
AS DEDUCED FROM  
*SCRIPTURE AND PRIMITIVE USAGE;*  
ADDRESSED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE  
UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES  
IN THE  
CITY OF NEW-YORK.

BY *SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.*

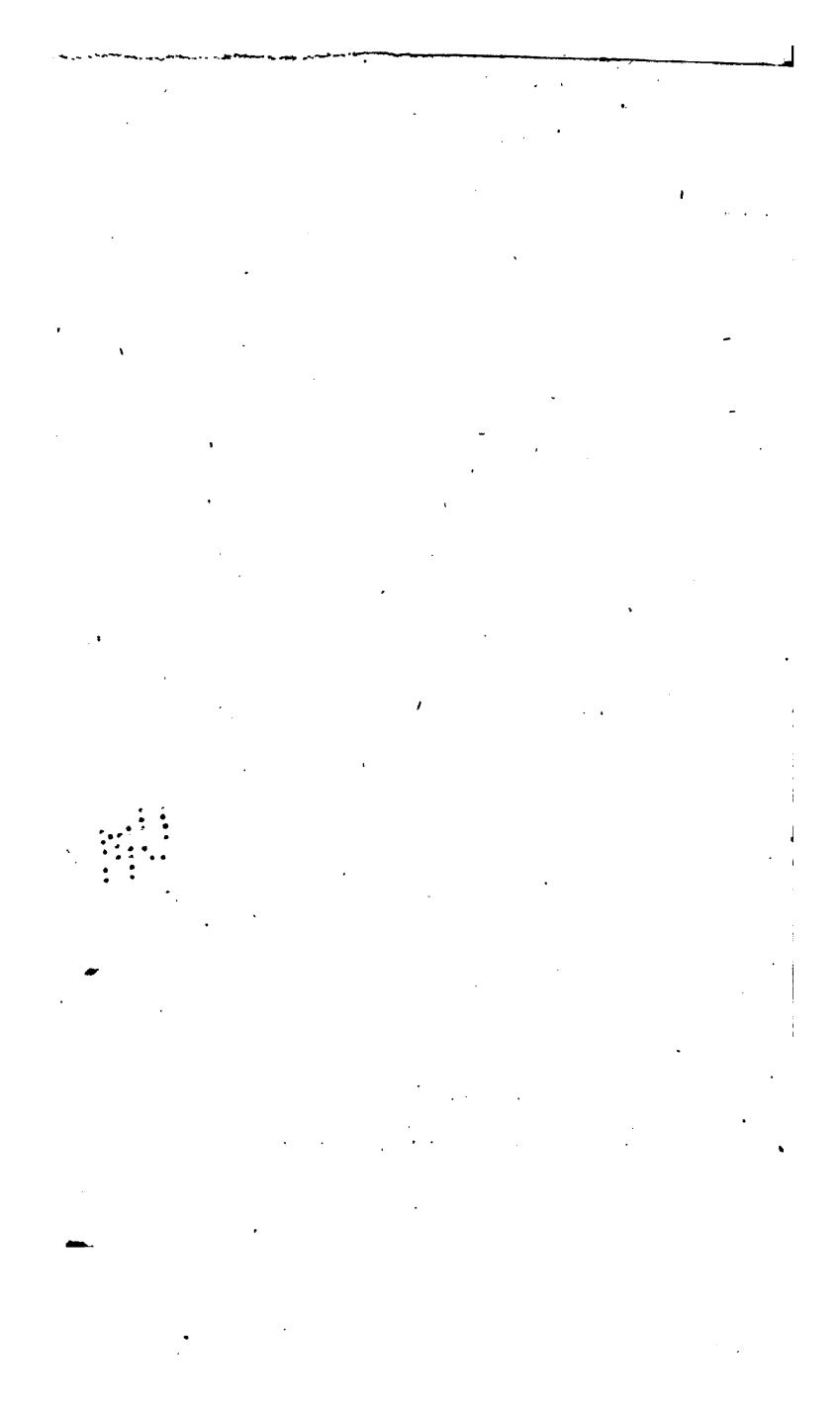
ONE OF THE PASTORS OF SAID CHURCHES.

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*NEW-YORK:*

PRINTED BY HOPKINS AND SEYMOUR,  
No. 118, Pearl-street.

1807.





gift  
Tappan Presb. Ass  
3-7-1932.

*District of New-York, ss.*

**B**E it remembered, that on the thirtieth day of June, 'in the thirty-first year of the Independence of the United States of America, Samuel Miller, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as author, in the words following, to wit:

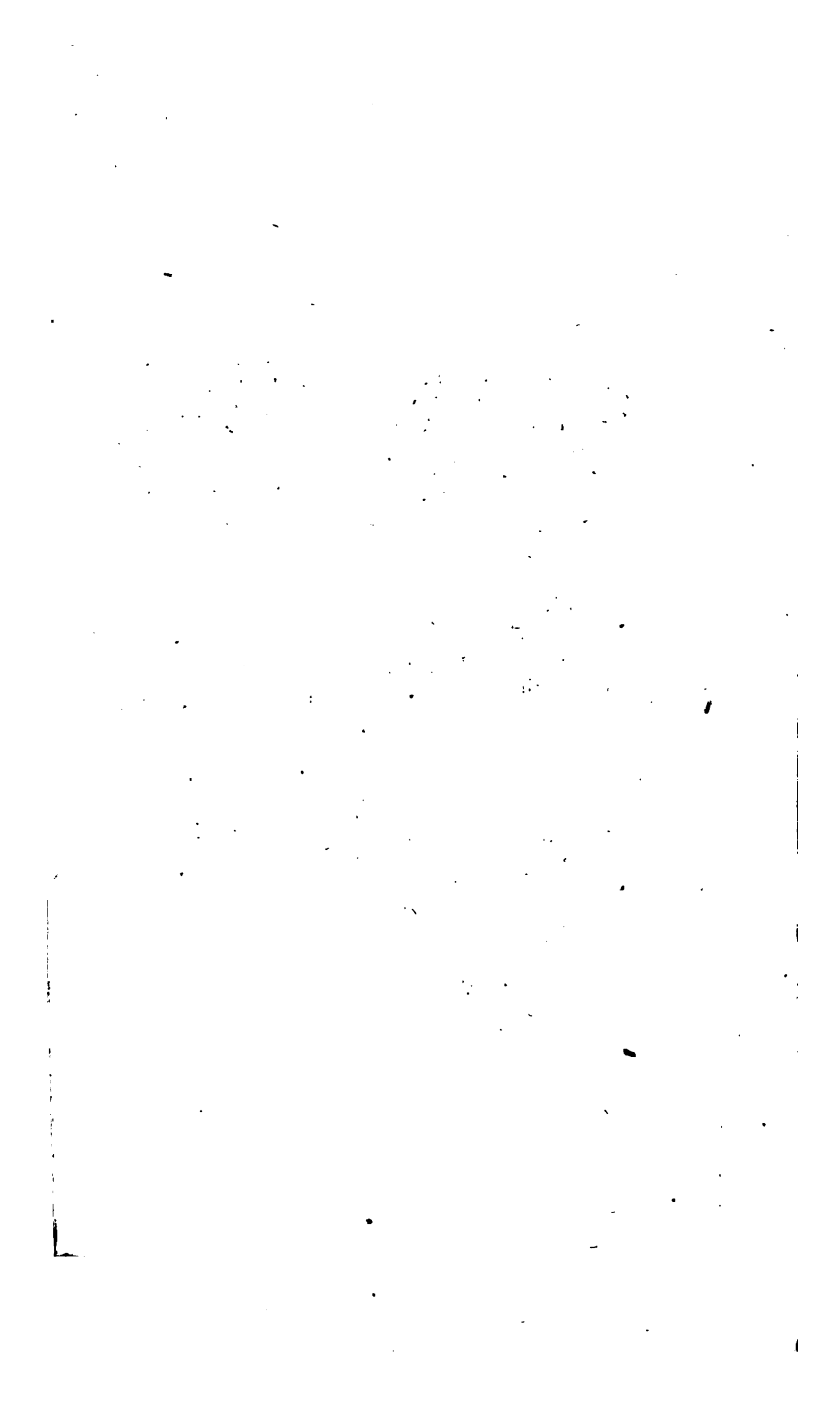
“ Letters concerning the Constitution and Order of the  
“ Christian Ministry, as deduced from Scripture and  
“ Primitive Usage; addressed to the members of the  
“ United Presbyterian Churches in the city of New-York.  
“ By Samuel Miller, D. D. one of the Pastors of said  
“ Churches.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled “ An act for the encouragement of  
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“ books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies,  
“ during the times therein mentioned ;” and also to an  
act, entitled “ An act supplementary to an act, entitled  
“ An act for the encouragement of learning, by secur-  
“ ing the copies of maps, charts, and books, to the  
“ authors and proprietors of such copies, during the  
“ times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits  
“ thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etch-  
“ ing historical and other prints.”

**EDWARD DUNSCOMB,**

*Clerk of the district of New-York.*

6-21-32 dws



# LETTERS, &c.

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## LETTER I.

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### INTRODUCTORY.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

**R**ELIGION is the common business of all men. Its duties cannot be performed by delegation. Every man is required to examine, to believe, and to obey the gospel for himself, and for himself to receive the promised reward. We may commit other concerns to the wisdom and fidelity of our fellow-men: but the care of his own soul belongs to each individual, and if he neglect it, no solicitude, no exertions on the part of others, can possibly avail him.

But although Religion be a concern which equally belongs to every man, yet it has pleased the all-wise Head of the Church to appoint an order of men more particularly to *minister in holy things*: Not to supersede the attention of other individuals to this object, but to stimulate, to guide, and in various ways to assist them in this attention. For

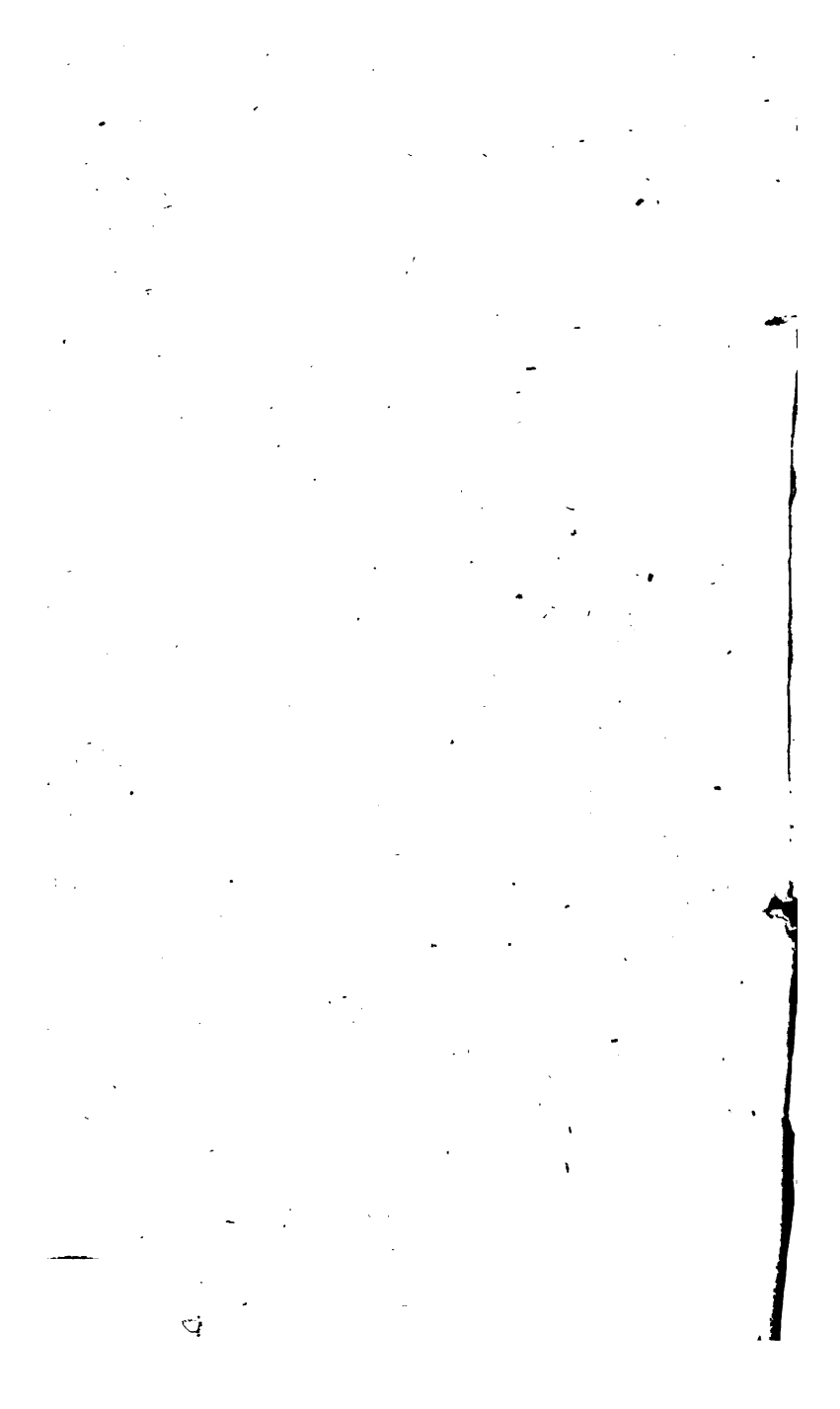
when this Divine Instructor ascended up on high, he gave some to be prophets, and some apostles, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

*Prophets* and *apostles* are no longer continued in the Church; because the immediate *inspiration*, and the *miraculous powers* with which they were endowed, are no longer necessary in dispensing the gospel. But though the age of inspired men, and of miracles be past, the Redeemer still continues the ministry of reconciliation. He still continues to raise up and send forth a succession of ambassadors, to declare his will, and to offer pardon and life to a fallen race.

The office sustained by ministers of the gospel is designated in scripture by a variety of names. They are sometimes called *Bishops*, because they are *overseers* of the flock committed to their charge. They are frequently styled *Presbyters*, or *Elders*, which are words of the same import, because, if not really advanced in age, they are bound to maintain the dignity and gravity of ecclesiastical rulers. They are denominated *Pastors*, because it is their duty to feed the flock of God. They are called *Doctors* and *Teachers*, because they are required to instruct those committed to their care, in the doctrines and duties of religion. They are said to be *Ambassadors*, importing that their duty is to declare the will of their Sovereign, and to negotiate a peace between the offended Majesty of heaven and guilty

men. They are represented as *Ministers* or *Servants*, because in all that they lawfully say and do, they act under the authority of a Master, whose declared will is their guide. They are *Stewards of the mysteries of God*, having the spiritual provisions of his house committed to them to be dispensed. They are *Watchmen*, being placed to guard the welfare of Zion, to give notice to men of their danger, and to exercise a vigilant care over all the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. They are *Shepherds*, inasmuch as they are appointed to feed, protect, guide, and govern the flock, under the direction of the Chief Shepherd. And, finally, according to the language of scripture, they are *Workmen* and *Labourers*, because they have a particular task assigned them; and because a faithful discharge of their duties requires diligence, exertion, and persevering labour.

Every thing relating to the Christian Church is important, and worthy of our serious attention. But it too often happens, that, on account of particular states of society, or other peculiar circumstances, some portions of the system of revealed truth are less regarded and examined than their relative importance demands. Accordingly, it has appeared to me, for several years past, that the order of Christ and his apostles respecting the **CHRISTIAN MINISTRY**, is a subject which has received less of your attention, and is, by many of you, less understood than it ought to be by those who profess to be members of that holy commu-



W Lewis Atterbury

copal Churches, without understanding, or, if they were understood, without distinguishing, the points in which these denominations agree, and in which they differ. To guard against mistakes here, it will be proper to state explicitly, in what respects their opinions are at variance.

We agree with our Episcopal brethren in believing, that Christ hath appointed Officers in his Church to preach the word, to administer sacraments, to dispense discipline, and to commit these powers to other faithful men. We believe, as fully as they, that there are different classes and denominations of officers in the Church of Christ; and that, among these, there is, and ought to be, a due *subordination*. We concur with them in maintaining, that none are regularly invested with the ministerial character, or can with propriety be recognized in this character, but those who have been set apart to the office by persons lawfully clothed with the power of ordaining. We unite with such of them as hold the opinion, that Christians, in all ages, are bound to make the apostolic order of the church, with respect to the ministry, as well as other points, the model, as far as possible, of all their ecclesiastical arrangements. And, finally, we contend, equally with them, that both the *name* and the *office* of *Bishop* were found in the primitive Church, and ought to be retained to the end of time. Many Episcopalians of narrow views, and of slender information, seem to take for granted that we discard *Bishops* in every sense



of the word ; and therefore, when they find this term in scripture, or in early uninspired writers, they exult, as if the word established their claim. But nothing can be more unfounded than this triumph. We all acknowledge that there were *Bishops* in the days of the apostles, and that there must be *Bishops* in every regularly constituted Church in every age\*.

But we differ from this sect of Christians in our views of the *character* and *powers* of Church officers. They suppose that there are three orders in the Christian Ministry, viz. *Bishops*, *Presbyters*, and *Deacons* : The first possessing the highest ecclesiastical power ; the second invested with authority to preach and administer both sacraments ; and the third empowered only to preach and baptize. We suppose, on the other hand, that there is, properly speaking, but one order of gospel ministers ; that there are, indeed, two other classes of Church officers, viz. *ruling Elders* and *Deacons* ; but that neither of these are authorized to *labour in the word and doctrine*, or to administer either of the Christian sacraments. We suppose that there

\* In the *Form of Government* of the Presbyterian Church, the pastors of Churches are expressly styled *Bishops* ; and this title is recommended to be retained, as both *scriptural* and *appropriate*. The same may be proved with respect to most, if not all the Reformed Churches. I am sensible that this title, as applied to ordinary pastors, has been the subject of much ridicule among the friends of prelacy ; a ridicule, however, which recoils with double force upon those who thus betray a want of acquaintance with the primitive application of the word.

is a plain distinction made in scripture between *Elders* who only *rule*, and *Elders* who, to the power of ruling, join also that of *teaching* and administering *sealing* ordinances. And we believe, that the friends of modern Episcopacy, in considering *Deacons* as an order of *Clergy*, and in empowering them to preach and baptize, are chargeable with a departure from the apostolic pattern.

But we differ from our Episcopal brethren, principally, with respect to the *character* and *powers* of the scriptural *Bishop*. They contend that *Bishops* are an order of ministers superior to *Presbyters*, having a different ordination, different powers, and a different sphere of duty. That while *Presbyters* have a right, by virtue of their office, to preach the word, and administer sacraments, to *Bishops* exclusively belong the powers of *ordination*, *confirmation*, and *government*. On the other hand, we maintain, that there is but one order of ministers of the gospel in the Christian Church; that every regular pastor of a congregation is a scriptural *Bishop*; or, in other words, that every *Presbyter*, who has been set apart, by *the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery*, and who has the pastoral charge of a particular Church, is, to all intents and purposes, in the sense of scripture, and of the primitive Church, a *Bishop*; having a right, in company with others, his equals, to ordain, and to perform every service pertaining to the Episcopal office. We can discover no warrant, either from the word of God, or from the early history

of the Church, for what is called *Diocesan Episcopacy*, or the pre-eminence and authority of one man, under the title of *Bishop*, or any other title, over a number of Presbyters and Churches : On the contrary, we are persuaded and affirm, that Christ and his Apostles expressly discountenanced such claims of pre-eminence ; and that all those forms of ecclesiastical government which are built upon these claims, are corruptions of apostolic simplicity, and deviations from the primitive order of the Church.

This being the case, you will readily perceive the necessity of clearly marking and keeping in view a distinction between the primitive and the modern sense of the word *Bishop*. Accordingly, in the perusal of the following sheets, you are earnestly requested to recollect, at every step, that by a *scriptural* or *primitive Bishop*, is always meant a Presbyter, Minister, Pastor, or whatever else he may be called, who has the pastoral care of a particular congregation ; and that by *scriptural* or *primitive Episcopacy*, is meant that government of the Church, by such Bishops, which existed in pure apostolic times, and for near two hundred years afterwards. And, on the other hand, that, by *modern Bishops*, and *modern Episcopacy*, is meant that government of the Church by prelates, which took its rise from ecclesiastical ambition, long after the days of the apostles, and which, with other innovations on primitive order, has since claimed to rest on the authority of Christ.

It ought further to be understood, that among those who espouse the Episcopal side in this controversy, there are three classes.

The *first* consists of those who believe that neither Christ nor his apostles laid down any particular form of ecclesiastical government, to which the Church is bound to adhere in all ages. That every Church is free, consistently with the divine will, to frame her constitution agreeably to her own views, to the state of society, and to the exigencies of particular times. These prefer the Episcopal government, and some of them believe that it was the primitive form; but they consider it as resting on the ground of *human expediency* alone, and not of *divine appointment*. This is well known to have been the opinion of Archbishops *Cranmer*, *Grindal*, and *Whitgift*; of Bishop *Leighton*, of Bishop *Jewel*, of Dr. *Whitaker*, of Bishop *Reynolds*, of Archbishop *Tillotson*, of Bishop *Burnet*, of Bishop *Croft*, of Dr. *Stillingfleet*, and of a long list of the most learned and pious divines of the Church of England, from the reformation down to the present day.

Another class of Episcopalians go further. They suppose that the government of the Church by *Bishops*, as a superior order to *Presbyters*, was sanctioned by apostolic example, and that it is the duty of all Churches to imitate this example. But while they consider episcopacy as necessary to the *perfection* of the Church, they grant that it is by no means necessary to her *existence*; and accordingly, without hesitation, acknowledge as true Churches

of Christ, many in which the Episcopal doctrine is rejected, and Presbyterian principles made the basis of ecclesiastical government. The advocates of this opinion, also, have been numerous and respectable, both among the clerical and lay members of the Episcopal Churches in England, and the United States. In this list appear the venerable names of Bishop *Hall*, Bishop *Downham*, Bishop *Bancroft*, Bishop *Andrews*, Archbishop *Usher*, Bishop *Forbes*, the learned *Chillingworth*, Archbishop *Wake*, Bishop *Hoadly*, and many more, whose declarations on the subject will be more particularly detailed in another place.

A third class go much beyond either of the former. While they grant that God has left men at liberty to modify every other kind of government according to circumstances, they contend that one form of government for the Church is unalterably fixed by divine appointment; that this form is Episcopal; that it is absolutely *essential* to the *existence* of the Church; that, of course, wherever it is wanting, there is no Church, no regular ministry, no valid ordinances; and that all who are united with religious societies, not conforming to this order, are "aliens from Christ," "out of the appointed road to heaven," and have no hope but in the "uncovenanted mercies of God."

It is confidently believed that the two former classes taken together, embrace at least nineteen parts out of twenty of all the Episcopalians in

Great-Britain and the United States ; while, so far as can be learned from the most respectable writings, and other authentic sources of information, it is only the small remaining proportion who hold the extravagant opinions assigned to the third and last of these classes.

Against these exorbitant claims there is, prior to all inquiry into their evidence, a strong general presumption, for the following reasons :

*First*—It is placing a point of external order on a par with the *essence* of religion. I readily grant, that every observance which the great Head of the Church enjoins by express precept, is indispensably binding. But it is certainly contrary to the genius of the Gospel dispensation, which is pre-eminently distinguished from the Mosaic economy by its simplicity and spirituality, to place forms of outward order among those things which are essential to the very existence of the Church. We know from scripture, that the visible form of the Church has been repeatedly altered, without affecting her essence.

*Secondly*—Against this doctrine there is another ground of presumption ; because it represents the rite of *ordination* as of superior importance to the whole system of divine truth and ordinances, which it is the duty of Christian ministers to dispense. According to this doctrine, *Presbyters* are fully authorized to preach that *Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to*

admit members into the Church by baptism ; to administer the Lord's supper ; and, in short, to engage in all those ministrations which are necessary to *edify the body of Christ* : but to the regular introduction of a minister into office, by the imposition of hands, they are not competent. Is not this, in other words, maintaining, that the Gospel is inferior to its ministers ; that the sacraments are less solemn and elevated ordinances than a rite, which all Protestants allow not to be a sacrament ; that the dispensation of God's truth is a less dignified function, than selecting and setting apart a servant of the truth ; that the *means* are more important than the *end* ? If so, then every man of sound mind will pronounce, that, against such a doctrine, there is, antecedent to all inquiry, a reasonable and strong presumption.

*Thirdly*—If it be admitted, that there are no true ministers but those who are episcopally ordained ; and that none are in communion with Christ, excepting those who receive the ordinances of his Church from the hands of ministers thus ordained ; then Christian character, and all the marks by which we are to judge of it, will be placed on new ground ; ground of which the scriptures say nothing ; and which it is impossible for one Christian in a thousand to investigate. When the word of God describes a real Christian, it is in such language as this—He is *born of the Spirit* ; he is a new creature ; old things are passed away ;

*behold, all things are become new. He believes in Christ and repents of all sin. He crucifies the flesh with the affections and lusts : he delights in the law of the Lord after the inward man :—he strives against sin : he is meek, humble, full of mercy and good fruits : he loves his brethren whom he hath seen, as well as God whom he hath not seen : he is zealous of good works : and makes it his constant study to imbibe the Spirit, and to imitate the example of the Redeemer.* These are the evidences of Christian character which fill the New-Testament, and which meet us wherever the subject is discussed. According to this representation, the only *essential* pre-requisite to holding communion with Christ, is being united to him by a living faith ; that faith which purifies the heart, and is productive of good works. But if the extravagant doctrine which we oppose be admitted ; then no man, however abundantly he may possess all these characteristics, can be in communion with Christ, unless he is also in communion with the Episcopal Church. That is, his claim to the Christian character cannot be established by exhibiting a holy temper and life ; but depends on his being in the line of a certain ecclesiastical descent. In other words, the inquiry whether he is in covenant with Christ, is not to be answered by evidences of personal sanctification ; but resolves itself into a question of clerical *genealogy*, which few Christians in the world are capable of exam-



ining, and which no mortal can certainly establish \*. There is no possibility of avoiding this conclusion on the principle assumed. And I appeal to you, my brethren, whether a principle which involves such consequences, has not strong presumption against it.

*Fourthly*—If the doctrine in question be admitted, then we virtually pronounce nine-tenths of the whole Protestant world to be in a state of excommunication from Christ. I know it has been often said, by zealous writers on this subject, that the great body of the Protestant Churches are Episcopal; and that those who adopt the Presbyterian government make but a very small portion of the whole number. But I need not tell those who are acquainted with the history of the Church since the reformation, and with the present state of the Christian

\* Several distinguished writers in Great-Britain, who have lately espoused, with much warmth, the exclusive Episcopal notions under consideration, do not scruple to adopt and avow this inference, at least in substance. They assert, that *all* who "are in communion with the Episcopal Church, are in communion with Christ," and in the "sure road to salvation." They deny that there is any "pledged" or "covenanted mercy;" in other words, that there are any *promises* given in the gospel to persons who are not in communion with that Church, however sincere their faith and repentance, and however ardent their piety. And, accordingly, they turn into ridicule every attempt to distinguish between a *professing* Episcopalian, and a *real* Christian. It is scarcely necessary to add, that many of the divines of their own Church reject this doctrine with abhorrence, and have publicly pronounced it to be as repugnant to scripture, as it is dangerous to the souls of men.

world, that this representation is wholly incorrect. The very reverse is true ; as I shall more fully show in a subsequent letter. Are we then prepared to adopt a principle which cuts off so large a portion of the Protestant world from the visible Church, and represents it as in a state in some respects worse than that of the heathen ? It is to be presumed that every considerate man will require the most pointed evidence of divine warrant, before he admits a principle so tremendous in its consequences.

It is not asserted that these considerations prove the extravagant episcopal doctrine from which they flow to be false. A doctrine may be unpalatable, and yet true. Whatever is plainly revealed in scripture, we are to receive without any regard to consequences. But when a principle is repugnant to reason, contradicts the analogy of faith, and involves consequences deeply wounding to the bosom of charity, we may safely pronounce that there is a presumption against it, antecedent to all inquiry ; and that before we embrace such a principle, the evidence of its divine warrant ought to be more than commonly clear and decisive.

With the great body of Episcopalians in this country, and elsewhere, it is extremely easy to live on the most friendly terms. Though attached to the peculiarities of their own denomination, they extend the language and the spirit of charity to other Churches. We, of course, think them in

error, because we are persuaded that Episcopacy, in the form for which they contend, is an innovation. Yet as long as they keep within the bounds of that liberal preference and zeal for their own forms, both of government and worship, which every man ought to cherish for the Church with which he connects himself, we must approve of their sincerity, while we cannot unite with them in opinion. But with those (and we have reason to be thankful that the number is very small) who make exclusive claims, of a nature nearly allied to the doctrine of Popish infallibility; who declare that their own, and the Roman Catholic, are the only Churches of Christ among us; who embrace every opportunity of denouncing all other ministers, as presumptuous intruders into the sacred office, their ministrations a nullity, and those who attend on them as aliens from the covenant of grace; with these it is not so easy to live in that harmonious and affectionate intercourse which is highly desirable among Christians of different denominations. But even toward these, it is your duty to cultivate a spirit of forbearance and charity; and while you are careful to arm yourselves with the means of defence against their attacks, remember that you are bound to make allowance for their prejudices, to forgive their uncharitableness, and to pity their delusion. Among depraved and erring mortals, differences of opinion will ever exist. The most pious and exemplary Christians cannot always agree, especially on subjects of minor im-

portance connected with religion. Make it your study, then, to be unanimous in affection towards Christians of every name, however you may be compelled to differ from many of them in opinion. Never forget that all real believers are *one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*. It is my earnest wish that this sentiment may be deeply impressed on my own heart while I write, and on yours while you read. For though, with respect to the subject on which I am about to address you, I am *fully persuaded in my own mind*; and though I confidently believe that our views of the Christian ministry are not only just, but also highly important in their practical influence; yet I have no doubt that many who differ on subjects of this nature, are followers of the same Master, are building on the same foundation, and will finally dwell together in that world of perfect love, where men shall *come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of our Father*.

You will, perhaps, ask me, whether those who sincerely hold the high-toned Episcopal notions which have been mentioned, can be reasonably blamed for endeavouring to propagate them? Nay, whether it is not as much their duty as their right to do so, while they entertain these convictions? I answer, such persons are to be viewed in the same light with those who *conscientiously* believe (and no doubt there are many such) that *transubstantiation*

is a doctrine of scripture ; that the *Pope* is infallible ; that *images* are a great help to devotion ; and that there is no salvation out of the pale of the Church of *Rome*. Persons who hold these opinions are not to be blamed for wishing to disseminate doctrines which they regard as true and important ; but they are to be both blamed and pitied for believing them, when the means of gaining more correct views are within their reach ; for setting up a standard of duty and of Christian character which the Saviour never knew ; and *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*. *Paul*, when he was persecuting the Church of Christ and wasting it, *verily thought within himself that he was doing God service* ; yet we have the best authority for saying that this miserable mistake did not render him blameless in the sight of heaven.

The truth is, every sect of Christians must be considered as having a right to maintain and propagate those opinions, which they sincerely believe to be true ; and others have an equal right, and are equally bound, when they see errors propagated, to examine, and with a suitable spirit, to expose and refute them. Nor are discussions of this kind by any means to be regarded as useless. When conducted with the meekness and benevolence of the Gospel, they are productive of various substantial benefits. *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

Had any of the numerous works which have

been published on the subject of these letters been in general circulation among you, or had it been easy to put them in circulation, I should have thought it unnecessary to ask your attention to the following sheets. But as most of those works are too voluminous to be generally read; as several of the best of them are in a language not generally understood; as many of them contain much matter inapplicable to the state of our country; and as others, being intended to answer particular purposes, are too confined in their views, I have thought myself justifiable in attempting to lay the subject before you in a form somewhat different from that of any work with which I am acquainted. And in doing this, I am not without the hope, that you will be disposed to receive with some partiality, and to peruse with a kind interest, an address from one who has laboured sincerely, though with many infirmities, for more than twelve years, to promote your spiritual interest, and who *has no greater pleasure than to see you walking in the truth.*

To treat the question considered in the following pages, in all its extent, and even to present the principal arguments with a fulness desirable to some readers, would be to fill several volumes. In contracting the discussion, therefore, within the limits of this little manual, I have laid myself under the necessity of being every where extremely brief, and of totally excluding many topics, both of argument and illustration, which might be profitably introduced. But, amidst this unavoidable brevity,

I hope you will do me the justice to believe, that no assertion will be made but what I conscientiously consider as susceptible of the most abundant proof; that no arguments will be stated, but those which I believe to have stood immoveably solid, after every attempt to answer them; that no authorities will be produced, but those which are generally admitted to be of the most respectable character; and, in a word, that the whole subject will be presented as fairly and impartially as I am able. With respect to *authorities*, indeed, I have endeavoured, in all cases in which I could obtain access to them, to quote the most distinguished Episcopal writers themselves. The concessions of learned and wary adversaries, in favour of our doctrines, carry with them peculiar weight.

But before I conclude this introductory letter, suffer me, my dear brethren, to remind you, that the names and powers of Christ's ministers, and the form of government adopted in his Church, though objects of inquiry, on various accounts, highly interesting, are yet to be numbered among the *externals* of religion. You may entertain perfectly correct opinions on these subjects, and yet, after all, have no just claim to the Christian character. You may be connected with the purest Church on earth, and may receive all its ordinances, from the hands of the most regular and valid ministry in Christendom, and yet be *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise*. It is true, the externals of reli-

gion have a closer connexion with its spirit and power than is commonly imagined ; but still they are externals only, and must not be suffered to usurp a disproportioned share of our regard. The scriptures speak to us frequently respecting the outward organization of the Church ; but they speak to us much more frequently ; they dwell with much more fervent and solemn emphasis, on that faith, which unites the soul to Jesus Christ ; that repentance which is unto life ; and that holiness of temper and of practice, *without which no man can see the Lord.* Let me beseech you, then, to remember, in every stage of this discussion, that, *in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature ;* and that, while *one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, and another, I am of Cephas,* unless we are all *of Christ,* united to him by a vital faith, and built upon him as the only foundation of our hope, we cannot see the kingdom of God. “ Every believer in Jesus,” says an eminent Episcopalian, “ who is a partaker of the grace of God “ in truth, is a member of the true Church, to “ whatever particular denomination of Christians “ he may belong ; without this, Popes, Bishops, “ Presbyters, Pastors, or Deacons, are but the “ limbs of Anti-christ and of the Synagogue of “ Satan ; and belong to no Church which the “ great Shepherd and Bishop of souls will acknowledge for his own.”



## LETTER II.

### *Testimony of Scripture.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

**I**N all disputes relating either to the faith or the practice of Christians, the first, and the grand question is, *What saith the Scripture?* This is the ultimate and the only infallible standard. Whatever is not found in the Bible cannot be considered, in any sense, as *essential* either to the doctrine or the order of the Church. This maxim is especially applicable to the subject now under discussion. As the Christian ministry is an office deriving its existence and its authority solely from Jesus Christ, the King and Head of his Church, it is obvious that his Word is the *only* rule by which any claims to this office can properly be tried, and the duties and powers of those who bear it, ascertained. Every other standard is unauthorized, variable, and uncertain. On the word of God alone can we with confidence and safety rely for direction in things relating to his spiritual kingdom. The declarations of two eminent Episcopal writers on this subject are just and weighty. "The Scripture," says Dr. *Sherlock*, "is all of a piece: every part of it agrees with the rest. The Fathers many

“times contradict themselves and each other.” In the same strain speaks the celebrated *Chillingworth*.—“I, for my part, after a long, and (as I  
 “verily hope and believe) impartial search of  
 “the true way to eternal happiness, do profess  
 “plainly, that I cannot find any rest for the sole of  
 “my feet, but upon this rock only, viz. the Scrip-  
 “ture. I see plainly, and with my own eyes,  
 “councils against councils, some Fathers against oth-  
 “ers; the same Fathers against themselves, a con-  
 “sent of Fathers of one age against a consent of  
 “Fathers of another age, and the Church of one  
 “age against the Church of another age.”—But it  
 is needless to multiply reasonings or authorities on  
 this subject. The *sufficiency* and *infallibility* of the  
 Scriptures alone, as a rule of faith and practice,  
 was assumed as the grand principle of the Reforma-  
 tion from Popery, and is acknowledged to be  
 the foundation of the Protestant cause.

Let us, then, examine what the Scriptures say  
 on the point in dispute. And here it is proper to  
 premise, that whoever expects to find any formal  
 or explicit decisions on this subject, delivered by  
 Christ or his Apostles, will be disappointed. It is  
 true, the discourses of the Saviour, and the writ-  
 ings of those who were inspired with the know-  
 ledge of his will, contain many observations and  
 instructions concerning the Christian ministry: but  
 they are chiefly employed in prescribing the quali-  
 fications, and urging the duties of those who serve  
 God in the Gospel of his Son, rather than in defining

their titles, in settling questions of rank and precedence among them, or in guarding the immunities and honors of their office. The necessity of knowledge, piety, zeal, diligence, self-denial, meekness, patience, fortitude, and eminent holiness, in ministers of the Gospel, is urged with a frequency, a minuteness, and a force, which evince that, in the estimation of infinite Wisdom, they are regarded as of primary importance. While questions respecting priority, and grades, and privileges, are never once formally discussed, only occasionally alluded to, and then in a manner so indistinct and cursory as to show that they were considered as objects of inferior moment. What are we to infer from this want of absolute explicitness in the sacred writings? Not that Church Government is a matter of small importance. It would be easy to prove that this is a very dangerous extreme. But we certainly *must* infer, that the Spirit of God does not teach us to lay so much stress on points of ecclesiastical order, as on those precious doctrines which relate immediately to the Christian character and hope, which “form the essence, and fill “the volume of the sacred records.”

But while the scriptures present no formal or explicit decisions on this subject, we find in them a mode of *expression* and a number of *facts*, from which we may, without difficulty, ascertain the outlines of the apostolic plan of Church order. By a careful attention to this language, and to these facts, if I mistake not, it will be easy to show—

That Christ gave but one commission for the office of the Gospel ministry, and that this office, of course, is one.

That the words *Bishop*, and *Elder*, or *Presbyter*, are uniformly used in the New Testament as convertible titles for the same office.

That the same *character* and *powers* which are ascribed, in the sacred writings, to *Bishops*, are also ascribed to *Presbyters*; thus plainly establishing the identity of *order*, as well as of *name*. And finally,

That the Christian Church was organized by the apostles after the model of the *Jewish Synagogue*, which was unquestionably Presbyterian in its form\*.

If these four positions can be established, there will remain no doubt on any candid mind how the question in dispute ought to be decided.

I. It is evident that Christ gave but one commission for the office of the Gospel ministry, and that this office, of course, is one.

The Commission which our Lord gave to his apostles, and in them to his ministers in every age, is expressed in the following words—*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of*

\* The word *Presbyterian*, though it is commonly used to designate those Churches, which are governed by *Presbyteries* and *Synods*, as the Churches of *Geneva*, *Holland*, *Scotland*, and those of this denomination in the *United States*; yet all those Churches are, in the leading sense of the word, *Presbyterian*, in which *Presbyters* ordain, and are regarded as holding the highest ecclesiastical office.

*the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost — Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world\**. Then said Jesus to them again, *Peace be unto you : As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost—whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained†*. These passages form the grand commission under which all lawful ministers have acted from the moment in which it was delivered to the present time ; and under which they must and will act to the end of the world.

This commission, it is confessed on all hands, was originally given to one order of ministers only, viz. the eleven Apostles. The Seventy disciples had been employed on a temporary service, and that, strictly speaking, under the Jewish dispensation. For as the Christian Church did not receive its distinct constitution till after the resurrection of Christ ; as the Apostles were made fixed officers of the Church, by virtue of this new commission, and not of any former appointment ; and as no such new commission was given to the Seventy disciples, it is manifest that they are not to be considered as ministers of the New Testament dispensation at all. The Saviour, then, in this last solemn

\* Matth. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

† John xx. 21, 22, 23.

interview, addressed the Eleven only. To them he committed the whole ministerial authority in his kingdom. The commission, therefore, when it was first delivered, certainly constituted no more than one order of Gospel ministers.

That this commission embraces the highest and fullest ecclesiastical power, that has been, is, or can be possessed by any of the ministers of Christ, all Protestants allow. And that it conveys a right to preach the word, to administer sacraments, and to ordain other men to the work of the ministry, Episcopalians, as well as others, grant. Now this commission either expired with the apostles, to whom it was originally delivered, or it did not. If it did expire with them, then no ministers of the Gospel, since their day, have had any commission, for there is no other left on record. But if it did not expire with them, then it is directed equally to their successors in all ages. But who are these successors? Demonstrably all those who are authorized to perform those functions which this commission recognizes, that is, to preach, and to administer the sealing ordinances of the Church. Every minister of the Gospel, therefore, who has these powers, is a successor of the apostles, is authorized by this commission, and stands on a footing of official equality with those to whom it was originally delivered, so far as their office was ordinary and perpetual.

It is remarkable, that, in this commission, dispensing *the Word of life*, and administering Sa-

*oraments*, are held forth as the most prominent, important, and solemn duties of Christian ministers. The power of *ordaining* others is not mentioned at all ; and we only infer that it is included, because the commission recognizes the continuance of the office and duties of ministers *to the end of the world*. Must we not infer then, that all who have a right to *preach* and *baptize*, have a right, of course, to *ordain* ? Does it comport with the spirit of this commission, to represent the former functions, which are mentioned with so much distinctness and solemnity, as pertaining to the lowest order in the Church ; and the latter, which is only included by inference, as reserved for a higher order ? Those who are confessed to have the most important and distinguished powers conveyed by a commission, must be considered as possessing the whole. *What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

There seems to be no method of evading the force of this argument, but by supposing, that the ministerial powers conveyed by this commission, were *afterwards divided* ; and that, while some retained the *whole*, others were invested with only a *part* of these powers. In other words, that the same commission, since the days of the apostles, makes some *Bishops*, clothed with the highest powers, and others *Presbyters*, with powers of a subordinate kind. But does not this supposition carry with it its own refutation ? Can one form of investiture constitute different orders ? Formal reasoning cannot be necessary to set aside such an ab-

surdity. But were the supposition which has been stated ever so legitimate on the score of reasoning, it is altogether unsupported in point of fact. Where is the evidence of this pretended *division* of ministerial powers? When was it made? By whom? In what manner were the powers in question divided? The commission itself gives no hint of such a division. No subsequent passage of scripture suggests any thing of the kind. Nothing that so much as seems to warrant such a supposition, is to be found in all the book of God. Nay, the contrary most manifestly appears. For when, after our Lord's ascension, we find the apostle *Paul*, and other inspired writers, giving instructions concerning the ministerial office and duties, they always speak in the spirit of the original commission; and represent *teaching* men the way of salvation, *edifying* the Church, and administering the *seals* of the covenant, as the highest functions belonging to this office. These are ever the principal objects to which their precepts and exhortations are directed, and which they evidently regard as paramount to all questions of precedence and privilege.

Until, then, the friends of three orders in the Christian ministry produce, from Scripture, some other commission than that which we have seen; or find some explicit warrant for a threefold division of the powers which this one commission conveys, we are compelled to conclude, that our Lord contemplated but one standing order of Gos-



pel ministers in his Church ; and that all who are empowered to preach his Word, and administer his Sacraments, belong to this order.

II. That *Bishops* are not, by divine right, different from, or superior to, *Presbyters*, is further evident, because the terms *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are uniformly used in the New Testament, as convertible titles for the same office.

The Greek word (*ἐπίσκοπος*) which we translate *Bishop*, literally signifies an *Overseer*. This word appears to have been adopted by the apostles from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (generally called the *Septuagint*) which was in common use among the Christians of that day. In this celebrated version, the word is employed frequently, and to designate officers of various grades and characters, civil, military, and ecclesiastical. The inspired writers of the New Testament, observing that this word, as a title of office, was much in use, and familiarly understood among those who had the scriptures in the popular language in their hands, thought proper to adopt and apply it to the officers of Christ's spiritual kingdom.

The word (*πρεσβυτερος*) which the translators of the New Testament render *Elder*, and which precisely answers to the word *Presbyter*, literally signifies an *aged person*. But as among the Jews, and the eastern nations generally, persons advanced in age were commonly selected to fill stations of dignity and authority, the word *Presbyter*, or *Elder*, became, in process of time, an established

title of office. The Jews had rulers called by this name, not only over their nation, but also over every city, and every synagogue. To a Jew, therefore, no term could be addressed more perfectly intelligible and familiar. The apostles finding this to be the case with the most of those among whom they ministered, gave the name of *Elder* to the pastors and rulers of the Churches which they organized; and the rather because these pastors were generally in fact taken from among the more grave and aged converts to the Christian faith.

From this statement it will appear, that *Presbyter*, if we attend to its original meaning, is a word of more honorable import than *Bishop*. *Presbyter* is expressive of *authority*, *Bishop* of *duty*. The former implies the *dignity* and *power* of a ruler; the latter conveys the idea of *work*, or of executing a prescribed *task*. But whatever may be the comparative degrees of honor expressed by these terms, it is certain that they are uniformly employed, in the New Testament, as convertible titles for the same office. An attentive consideration of the following passages will establish this position beyond all doubt.

The first which I shall quote is found in Acts **xx.** 17, 28. *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the Elders (or Presbyters, πρεσβυτερος) of the Church. And when they were come to him he said unto them, Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you*

overseers (or *Bishops*, επισκοποις) to feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.— In this passage it is evident, that the same persons who, in the 17th verse are styled *Elders* or *Presbyters*, are in the 28th called *Bishops*. This, indeed, is so incontestible, that the most zealous Episcopalian, so far as I know, has never called it in question. It is further observable, that in the city of *Ephesus* there were a number of *Bishops*, who governed the Church in that city, as co-ordinate rulers, or in common council. This is wholly irreconcilable with the principles of modern episcopacy; but perfectly coincides with the presbyterian doctrine, that scriptural *Bishops* are the Pastors of single congregations\*.

\* It has been much controverted whether, in each of the larger cities, in which Christianity was first planted, such as *Jerusalem*, *Ephesus*, *Antioch*, *Corinth*, &c. there was more than one congregation of Christians. In other words, whether by the *Church at Ephesus* we are to understand, a single congregation, or several separate societies, as the *Presbyterian Church in New-York* comprehends several congregations?—From the *multitudes* that are said to have believed in those cities, it is probable there were several thousands of Christians in each of them; and as the places in which they assembled for public worship were small, perhaps most of them apartments in private dwellings, we cannot suppose that they were all able to assemble at the same time and place. The expedient, therefore, of dividing themselves into small associations would seem natural, and even unavoidable. We know that in the days of the apostles there were a number of *Bishops* in each of the cities of *Ephesus* and *Philippi*. It is most probable that these were pastors of so many different congregations. We are by no means to suppose, however, that in those days of persecution and peril, when Christians were almost afraid of appearing

The next passage to our purpose is the address of the apostle *Paul* to the *Philippians*, in the introduction of his Epistle to that Church. *Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the Bishops and Deacons.* Here, as well as in the case of *Ephesus*, just mentioned, we find the inspired writer speaking of a *number of Bishops* in a single city. It is true, Dr. *Hammond*, an eminent Episcopal writer, to avoid the force of this fact, so unfriendly to modern Episcopacy, would persuade us that *Philippi* was a Metropolitan city, and that the *Bishops* here spoken of, did not all belong to that city, but also included those of the neighbouring cities, under that Metropolis. But this supposition is not in the least degree countenanced by the apostle's language, the plain, unsophisticated meaning of which evidently refers us to the Bishops and Deacons which were at *Philippi*, and there only. Besides, Dr. *Whitby*, a later, and equally eminent Episcopal divine, assures us, that *Philippi* was not, at that time, a Metropolitan city, but under *Thessalonica*, which was the Metropolis of all *Macedonia*. Dr. *Stillingfleet* has also clearly shown, that there are no traces to be found within the first six centuries, of the Church at *Philippi* being a Metropolitan Church. Dr. *Maurice*, an- in public, and when their meetings were often held under the cover of midnight, that their division into *parishes*, or even into *congregations*, was as regular and as precisely defined as at present; or that the same principles of reasoning in all cases apply to those small *house-churches*, as to modern congregations.

other zealous and able writer in favour of diocesan episcopacy, goes further. He acknowledges that Dr. *Hammond* stands alone, in the solution of the difficulty above mentioned; that he cannot undertake to defend it; and that "he could never find sufficient reason to believe these *Bishops* any other than *Presbyters*, as the generality of the Fathers, and of the Church of England have done." *Defence of Dioc. Episc.* p. 29.

The third passage to be adduced is in *Titus* i. It is as follows. *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain Elders, (Presbyters) in every city, as I had appointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a Bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, &c.* Here the apostle, in directing *Titus* to ordain *Elders*, enjoins upon him to choose those officers from among the most temperate, blameless, and faithful believers; and the reason he assigns for this injunction is, that a *Bishop must be blameless*; evidently meaning, that *Presbyter* and *Bishop* are the same office. On any other construction, the different parts of the address are unconnected, and the whole destitute of force. But these are charges which no man who is conversant with the writings of *Paul*, would ever think of bringing against them.

This passage also establishes another point. It

not only shows that the *Elders* here to be ordained, were considered and denominated *Bishops*, thereby proving the identity of the office designated by these names; but it likewise proves, beyond controversy, that, in apostolic times, it was *customary*, to have a *plurality* of these *Bishops* in a single city. We have before seen that there were a *number* of *Bishops* in the city of *Ephesus*, and a *number* more in the city of *Philippi*: but in the passage before us we find *Titus* directed to ordain a plurality of them in *every* city. This perfectly agrees with the Presbyterian doctrine, that scriptural *Bishops* were the pastors of single congregations, or *Presbyters*, invested, either separately or conjointly, as the case might be, with pastoral charges; but it is impossible to reconcile it with the modern notions of diocesan episcopacy.

There is one more passage, equally conclusive in this argument. It is that which is found in *1 Peter*, v. 1, 2. *The Elders (or Presbyters) which are among you I exhort, who am also an Elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof* (*ἐπισκοποῦντες*, that is, exercising the office, or performing the duties of *Bishops* over them) *not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.* The construction of this passage is obvious. It expressly represents *Presbyters* as *Bishops* of the flock, and solemnly exhorts them

to exercise the powers, and perform the duties of this office.

In short, the title of *Bishop*, as applied to ministers of the Gospel, occurs only *four* times in the New Testament: in *three* of these cases, there is complete proof that it is given to those who are styled *Presbyters*; and in the *fourth* case, there is strong presumption that it is applied in the same manner. On the other hand, the Apostle *Peter*, as we have just seen, in addressing an authoritative exhortation to other ministers, calls himself a *Presbyter*. The same is done by the Apostle *John*, in the beginning of his second and third epistles—*The Elder (Presbyter) unto the well beloved Gaius—The Elder unto the Elect Lady, &c.* Could more complete evidence be desired, that both these titles belonged equally, in the days of the Apostles, to the same office?

But it is not necessary further to pursue the proof that these names are indiscriminately applied in scripture to the same office. This is freely and unanimously acknowledged by the most respectable Episcopal writers. In proof of this acknowledgment, it were easy to multiply quotations. A single authority shall suffice. Dr. *Whitby* confesses, that “both the Greek and Latin Fathers do, with one consent, declare, that *Bishops* were called *Presbyters*, and *Presbyters Bishops*, in apostolic times, the names being then common.” *Notes on Philip. i. 1.*

I know that many advocates for Diocesan Epis-

copy have affected to make light of the argument, in favour of the parity of ministers, drawn from the indiscriminate application of these scriptural names. Indeed, some of them have attempted by florid declamation, and ludicrous comparisons, to turn the whole into ridicule. This is an extremely convenient method of evading the force of an argument which cannot be fairly answered. But to evade an argument is not to refute it. Besides, have those who reject all reasoning drawn from the application of scriptural *names*, considered whither this principle will lead them? Have they reflected how large a portion of those weapons with which they defend the Divine character, and the vicarious sacrifice of the blessed Redeemer, against the attacks of Socinians, and other heretics, are necessarily surrendered, if the *names* and *titles* of scripture are so vague and indecisive as they would, in this case, represent them? Will they venture to charge the great Head of the Church, who dictated the scriptures, with addressing his people in a language altogether indistinct, and calculated to mislead them, and that too on a subject which, they tell us, lies at the foundation not merely of the *welfare*, but of the very *existence* of the Church? Surely these consequences cannot have been considered. The argument, then, drawn from the indiscriminate application of the names *Bishop* and *Presbyter* to the same persons, is conclusive. It was pronounced to be so, by the venerable and learned *Jerome*, more than 1400 years



ago ; and his judgment has been adopted and supported by some of the greatest and best divines that have adorned the Christian Church, from that period down to the present day.

But we have something more to produce in support of our system, than the indiscriminate application of the *names* in question to one order of ministers. We can show—

III. That the same *character, duties, and powers,* which are ascribed in the sacred writings to *Bishops,* are also ascribed to *Presbyters,* thereby plainly establishing their identity of *order* as well as of *name.*

Had *Bishops* been constituted by the great Head of the Church, an order of ministers different from *Presbyters,* and superior to them, we might confidently expect to find a different commission given ; different qualifications required ; and a different sphere of duty assigned. But nothing of all this appears. On the contrary, the inspired writers, when they speak of ministers of the Gospel, by whichever of these names they are distinguished, give the same description of their character ; represent the same gifts and graces as necessary for them ; enjoin upon them the same duties ; and, in a word, exhibit them as called to the same work, and as bearing the same office. To prove this, let us attend to some of the principal powers vested in Christian ministers, and see whether the scriptures do not ascribe them equally to *Presbyters* and *Bishops.*

1. That *Presbyters* had, in apostolic times, as they now have, authority to *preach the word*, and *administer sacraments*, is universally allowed by Episcopalians themselves. Now, if we consult either the original commission, or subsequent instructions given to ministers, in various parts of the New Testament, we shall find these constantly represented as the highest acts of ministerial authority ; as the grand powers in which all others are included. Instead of finding in the sacred volume the smallest hint, that *ordaining* ministers, and *governing* the Church, were functions of an *higher* order than dispensing the word of eternal life, and the seals of the everlasting covenant ; the reverse is plainly and repeatedly taught. The latter, we have already seen, are the most prominent objects in the original commission ; they formed the principal business of the apostles wherever they went ; and all the authority with which they were vested is represented as being subservient to the promulgation of that *Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*. *Preaching* and *administering sacraments*, therefore, are the highest acts of ministerial authority ; they are far above ordination and government, as the *end* is more excellent than the *means* ; as the *substance* is more important than the *form*.

If then, *Presbyters* be authorized, as all acknowledge, to perform these functions, we infer that they are the highest order of Gospel ministers. Those who are empowered to execute the most

dignified and the most useful duties pertaining to the ministerial office, can have no superiors in that office. The Episcopal system, then, by depressing the *teacher*, for the sake of elevating the *ruler*, inverts the sacred order, and departs both from the letter and the spirit of Scripture. The language of Scripture is, *Let the Presbyters who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, ESPECIALLY THEY WHO LABOUR IN THE WORD AND DOCTRINE.* But the language of modern Episcopacy is, that labouring in the word and doctrine is a lower service in the Church, and government a more exalted: that *bearing rule* is more honorable and more important than to *edify*—a language which to be refuted needs only to be stated.

From these premises I am compelled to conclude, that the officer of the Christian Church who is authorized to preach and administer sacraments, cannot be an inferior or subordinate officer, but must be equal to, or rather the same with, the scriptural Bishop. And in this reasoning I am supported by the judgment of Bishop *Burnet*, who declares—“ Since I look upon the sacramental actions, as the highest of sacred performances, I cannot but acknowledge those who are empowered for them, must be of the highest office in the Church\*.”

2. The power of *government*, or of *ruling* the Church, is also committed to *Presbyters*. This is denied by Episcopalians; but the Scriptures ex-

\* Vindication of the Church and State of Scotland, p. 336.

pressly affirm it. The true meaning of the word *Presbyter*, in its official application, is a *church ruler* or *governor*, as Episcopalians themselves allow. Hence the "oversight" or government of the Church is in Scripture expressly assigned to *Presbyters* as their proper duty. The *Elders* to whom the Apostle *Peter* directed his first epistle, certainly had this power. To them it is said, *The Elders which are among you I exhort. Feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but as ensamples to the flock.* Scarcely any words could express more distinctly than these the power of ruling in the Church. But, as if to place the matter beyond all doubt, these *Elders* are exhorted to use this power with moderation, and not to tyrannize, or "lord it over God's heritage." Why subjoin this caution, if they were not invested with a governing authority at all?

The case of the *Elders* of *Ephesus* is still more decisive. When the Apostle *Paul* was about to take his final leave of them, he addressed them thus—*Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood, &c.* Here the government of this Church, as well as ministering in the word, is evidently vested in the *Elders*. No mention is made of any individual, who had the whole ruling power vested in him, or even a larger share of it than others. Had there been a *Bishop*

in this Church, in the Episcopal sense of the word, that is, a single person of superior order to these *Elders*, and to whom, of course, they were in subjection, it is strange that, in this whole account, we do not once find the most distant allusion to him\*. When the Apostle was telling the *Elders* that they should *never see his face more*, and that dissensions and difficulties were about to arise in their Church, could there have been a more fit occasion to address their superior, had there been such a man present? To whom could instruction have been so properly directed, in this crisis, as to the Chief Shepherd? On the other hand, supposing such a superior to have existed, and to have been prevented by sickness, or any other means, from attending at this conference, why did not the Apostle remind the *Elders* of their duty to him? Why did he not exhort them, in the strife and divisions which he foretold as approaching, to cleave to their *Bishop*, and submit to him, as the best means of unity and peace? And finally, supposing their *Bishop* to have been dead, and the office vacant, why did not the Apostle, when about to take leave of a flock so much endeared to him, select a *Bishop* for them, ordain him with his own hands, and commit the Church to his care? But not a word of all this appears. No hint is given of the

\* The reader will bear in mind, that the zealous advocates for Episcopacy suppose, and with one voice assert, that *Timothy* was *Bishop of Ephesus* at this time. On what grounds this assertion is made will be seen in the next letter.

existence of such a superior. On the contrary, the Apostle declares to these *Elders*, that the Holy Ghost had made them *Bishops* over the Church at *Ephesus*; he exhorts them to *rule* that Church; and when about to depart, never to see them more, he leaves them in possession of this high trust.

But the passage just quoted from 1 *Tim. v.* is absolutely conclusive on this point. *Let the Elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in word and doctrine.* Here the power of government in the Church is ascribed to *Presbyters* in terms which cannot be rendered more plain and decisive. Here, also, we find officers of the Church who are not recognized in the Episcopal system, but who are always found in the Presbyterian Church, viz. *Ruling Elders*, or those who are appointed to assist in governing the Church, but who do not preach or administer sacraments. But this is not all: *bearing rule* in the Church is unequivocally represented in this passage as a less honorable employment than preaching, or *labouring in the word and doctrine.* The mere *ruling Elder*, who performs his duty well, is declared to be worthy of "double honor;" but the Elder who, to this function, adds the more dignified and important one of preaching the Gospel of salvation, is declared to be entitled to honor of a *still higher* kind.

As this passage is directly hostile to the claims of modern Episcopacy, great exertions have been made to set aside its testimony. To effect this

the most unnatural glosses have been adopted. Instead of formally stating and answering these, I will content myself with delivering the opinions of three distinguished divines, whose judgment on such a subject will be despised by none. Dr. *Owen* declares—"This would be a text of uncontrollable evidence, if it had any thing but prejudice and interest to contend with. On the first proposal of this text—*That the Elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in word and doctrine*, a rational man, who is unprejudiced, who never heard of the controversy about ruling Elders, can hardly avoid an apprehension that there are two sorts of Elders, some that labour in the word and doctrine, and some who do not do so. The truth is, it was interest and prejudice that first caused some learned men to strain their wits to find out evasions from the evidence of this testimony; being so found, some others, of meaner abilities, have been entangled by them." The language of Dr. *Whitaker*, a zealous and learned Episcopalian, is equally strong and decided, with regard to this passage. "By these words," says he, "the Apostle evidently distinguishes between the Bishops and the inspectors of the Church. If all who rule well be worthy of double honor, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine, it is plain there were some who did not so labour; for if all had been of this description, the meaning would have been absurd; but the word *especially* points

“out a difference. If I should say, that all who study well at the university are worthy of double honor, *especially they who labour in the study of theology*, I must either mean that *all* do not apply themselves to *the study of theology*, or I should speak nonsense. Wherefore I confess that to be the most genuine sense by which pastors and teachers are distinguished from those who only governed.”—*Praelect. ap. Didioclav. p. 681.* Equally to our purpose is the opinion of that acute and learned Episcopalian, Dr. *Whitby*, in his Note on this passage. “The Elders of the Jews,” says he, “were of two sorts; 1st. Such as *governed* in the Synagogue; and 2dly. Such as ministered in *reading and expounding* their Scriptures, &c. And these the Apostle here declares to be the most honorable, and worthy of the chiefest reward. Accordingly, the Apostle, reckoning up the offices God had appointed in the Church, places *teachers* before *governments*. 1 Corin. xii. 28.”

3. The Scriptures also represent *Presbyters* as empowered to *ordain*, and as actually exercising this power. Of this we can produce at least three instances of the most decisive kind.

The first is recorded in *Acts* xiii. as follows. *Now there were in the Church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to*



the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. This is the most ample account of an ordination to be found in Scripture; and it is an account which, were there no other, would be sufficient to decide the present controversy in our favour. Who were the ordainers on this occasion? They were not *Apostles*. Lest this should be supposed, their names are given. They were not *Bishops*, in the modern sense of the word; for there were a number of them ministering together in the same Church. They were the *Prophets* and *Teachers* of the Church at *Antioch*. With respect to these *Teachers*, no higher character has ever been claimed for them than that of *Presbyters*, labouring in the word and doctrine. And as to the *Prophets*, though the precise nature of their endowments and office be not certainly known; yet there is complete evidence that they did not sustain that particular ecclesiastical rank, with which Episcopalians contend that, in the days of the Apostles, the power of *ordaining* was connected. Still these ministers *ordained*; and they did this under the immediate direction of the Holy Ghost, who cannot be supposed to have sanctioned any departure from an essential principle of Church government.

To invalidate this reasoning, some Episcopal writers have suggested that the ordination here recorded was performed not by the *Teachers*, but by

the *Prophets* only. But nothing like this appears in the sacred text. On the contrary, its plain and simple import forbids such a construction. The command to ordain *Paul* and *Barnabas* was directed both to the *Prophets and Teachers*; and we are told that *they* proceeded immediately to the performance of the solemn act to which they were called. To suppose, therefore, that the *Teachers* either did not engage in this ordination; or that, if they did participate in the transaction, it was rather as *witnesses* expressing consent, than as *ordainers* conveying authority, or ratifying a commission, is a supposition as illegitimate in reasoning, as it is repugnant to the sacred narrative.

Another plea urged against this example is, that it is not to be considered as an *ordination* at all; that both *Paul* and *Barnabas* had been recognized as ministers of the Gospel several years before this event; and that it is rather to be regarded as a solemn *benediction*, previous to their entering on a particular mission among the Gentiles. It is readily granted that *Paul* and *Barnabas* had been engaged in preaching the Gospel long before this time. But there is no evidence that either of them had ever before been set apart by human ordainers. It seemed good, therefore, to the Holy Ghost, that before they entered on their grand mission to the Gentiles, they should receive that kind of ordination, which was intended to be perpetual in the Church. No example of such an ordination had yet been given. If the practice were ever to be

established, it was necessary that a beginning should be made. And as these missionaries were about to travel among a people, who were not familiar with the rite of ordination by the imposition of hands, so well understood by the Jews, it was judged proper by infinite Wisdom to set this example for imitation in all subsequent periods. And as if to give the strongest practical declaration of ministerial parity, *Paul*, with all the elevation of his gifts, and all the lustre of his apostolic character, submitted to be ordained, together with his brother *Barnabas*, agreeably to the regular principles of Church order, by the prophets and teachers of the Church at *Antioch*.

It may further be observed, that if this be not an ordination, it will be difficult to say what constitutes one. Here were fasting, prayer, the imposition of hands, and every circumstance attending a formal investiture with the ministerial office, as particularly stated as in any instance on record, And accordingly Dr. *Hammond*, one of the most able and zealous advocates for Episcopacy, does not scruple to pronounce it a regular ordination; though for the sake of maintaining his system, he falls into the absurdity of supposing that *Simeon*, *Lucius*, and *Manaen*, were diocesan Bishops; a supposition wholly irreconcilable with the diocesan scheme, since they were all *ministering in the Church at Antioch*. Bishop *Taylor*, another eminent Episcopal writer, considers this transaction as a regular ordination; for speaking of *Paul*, he says

—“ He had the special honor to be chosen in an  
 “ extraordinary way ; yet he had something of the  
 “ ordinary too ; for in an extraordinary manner he  
 “ was sent to be ordained in an ordinary ministry.  
 “ His designation was as immediate as that of the  
 “ eleven apostles, though his ordination was not.”  
 This also was the judgment of the learned Dr.  
*Lightfoot*. “ No better reason,” says he, “ can be  
 “ given of this present action, than that the Lord  
 “ did hereby set down a platform of ordaining mi-  
 “ nisters to the Church of the Gentiles in future  
 “ times.” And, finally, *Chrysostom*, one of the  
 early Fathers, delivers the same opinion. He as-  
 serts that “ *Paul* was ordained at *Antioch*,” and  
 quotes the thirteenth chapter of the *Acts* of the  
 Apostles in support of his assertion.

But, after all, it does not destroy the argument,  
 even if we concede that the case before us was not  
 a regular ordination. It was certainly a solemn *se-*  
*paration to the work to which the Holy Ghost had*  
*called them*. This is the language of the inspired  
 writer, and cannot be controverted. Now it is a  
 principle which pervades the scriptures, that an in-  
 ferior is never called formally to pronounce benedic-  
 tion on an official superior. It is evident, therefore,  
 that those who were competent to set apart ecclesias-  
 tical officers to a *particular ministry*, were competent  
 to set them apart to the *ministry in general*. So  
 far, then, as the office sustained by *Paul* and *Bar-*  
*nabas* was ordinary and permanent in its nature, the  
*Presbyters in Antioch* were their equals. *Paul*, in-

deed, considered as endowed with inspiration, and with miraculous powers, was their superior; but as a regular officer of the Church of Christ, sent forth on established and ordinary service, he was not their superior; and he embraced frequent opportunities of testifying that this was his own view of the subject.

The next instance of an ordination performed by *Presbyters*, is that of *Timothy*, which is spoken of by the Apostle *Paul*, in the following terms. 1 *Tim.* iv. 14. *Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery.* All agree that the Apostle is here speaking of *Timothy's* ordination; and this ordination is expressly said to have been performed with *the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery*—that is, of the *Eldership*, or a council of *Presbyters*.

To this instance of Presbyterian ordination it is objected, by some Episcopal writers, that although a council of *Presbyters* appear, from this passage, to have laid their hands on *Timothy* upon this occasion, yet the ordination was actually performed by the Apostle alone, who elsewhere addresses *Timothy* in this language—*Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee, by the putting on of my hands.* 2 *Tim.* i. 6. They contend that, as *Paul* speaks of the ordination as being performed by the putting on of his hands, and with the laying on of the hands of the *Presbytery*, we are to infer that the power was

conveyed by *Him* only, and that the Presbyters only imposed their hands by way of *concurrence*, and to express their *approbation*.

But the Apostle, in speaking of a gift conveyed to *Timothy* by the putting on of *his* hands, either refers to the ordination of that young Minister, or he does not. Some have supposed that he does not refer to that transaction at all, but to an occasion and a solemnity altogether different, when, by the imposition of his hands alone, he communicated to *Timothy* the *extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost*, to impart which, by the laying on of hands, belonged, as is generally supposed, exclusively to the Apostles. If this supposition be admitted, and some of the greatest divines that ever lived have adopted it, then the objection before us totally falls to the ground, and it follows that the *Presbyters* alone were the ordainers in this instance. If, on the other hand, we suppose that the Apostle, in both passages, is speaking of the ordination of *Timothy*, and that he and the Presbytery both participated in the transaction, the supposition will be equally fatal to the Episcopal cause. For let it be remembered, that all Episcopalians, in this controversy, take for granted, that *Timothy* was, at this time, ordained a *Diocesan Bishop*. But if this were so, how came *Presbyters* to lay their hands on him at his ordination? We know that *Presbyters* in the Episcopal Church, are in the habit of laying on their hands, with those of the *Bishop*, in ordaining *Presbyters*; but was it ever heard of, in

the Christian Church, after the distinction between *Bishops* and *Presbyters* arose, that those who admitted this distinction suffered *Presbyters* to join with *Bishops*, by imposing hands in the consecration of a *Bishop*? No; on Episcopal principles, this would be an irregularity of the most absurd and inadmissible kind. To this our opponents reply, that the *Presbyters* in this case joined with the Apostle in the imposition of hands, not as *ordainers*, but merely to express their *concurrence* and *approbation*. But do *Presbyters*, even in this sense, unite in imposing hands in the consecration of a *diocesan Bishop*? Or were they ever known to do so in Episcopal Churches? Besides, after all, the whole idea of some laying on their hands in ordination, not as ordainers, but merely to express their *approbation*, is a conceit without any foundation in scripture; contradicted by the earliest and best records of the primitive Church; and manifestly invented to evade the force of an irresistible argument. I challenge any one to produce me a single passage from the word of God, or from any Christian writer within the first three hundred years after Christ, which gives the least countenance to this fanciful supposition.

But it is still urged, that the mode of expression is different with respect to the imposition of the Apostle's hands, and those of the Presbytery; that *Timothy* is said to have received his gift *by* the former, and *with* the latter. And accordingly much ingenious criticism has been wasted on the

prepositions *dia* and *meta*, in order to show, that the former alone expresses *agency*, while the latter more commonly signifies mere *concurrence*: from which it has been inferred that *Paul* alone was the real ordainer, or, in other words, conveyed the ministerial authority by the imposition of his hands; while the Presbyters laid on their hands only as witnesses, and for the purpose of giving their countenance to the transaction. I forbear to apply to this criticism those epithets which it has always appeared to me to deserve; nor shall I detain you by attempting to expose the weakness of that cause whose advocates fly for succour to a quibble, founded on the doubtful interpretation of two Greek particles. It is enough for me to assure such of you, my brethren, as are not able to judge for yourselves in this matter, that the criticism and quibble in question are wholly unworthy of your regard; that these words both frequently signify *by* as well as *with*, and express *agency*, as well as *concurrence*\*; and that the objection founded on any supposed difference of meaning in their application to this case, has not received the countenance even of the most learned and respectable advocates for diocesan Episcopacy.

\* It is remarkable that the learned *Jerome*, more than 1400 years ago, adopted the Presbyterian construction of this passage. He thus translates 1 Tim. iv. 14. *Noli negligere gratiam quæ in te est, quæ tibi data est prophetia, per impositionem manuum Presbyterii*: and expressly adduces the passage to prove that *Bishops* and *Presbyters* are, by divine right, *equal*. The same construction of the passage has been adopted by the most learned and judicious commentators ever since.



Some Episcopal writers, in order to avoid the difficulties above stated, have taken the liberty of supposing, that by the word *Presbytery* (πρεσβυτεριον) in this passage is to be understood, not a council of *Presbyters*, but the *College of the Apostles*. But this supposition is adopted without the least proof or probability. No instance has been, or can be produced, either from the New Testament, or from any early Christian writer, of the Apostles, as a collective body, being called a *Presbytery*. On the contrary, this word is always used, in scripture, in the writings of the primitive fathers, and particularly in the writings of *Ignatius*, (who is of the highest authority with our opponents in this dispute,) to signify a council of *Presbyters*, and never in any other sense. But, allowing the word *Presbytery* to have the meaning contended for, and that *Timothy* was ordained by the bench of Apostles; how came the modest and humble *Paul* to speak of the whole gift as conveyed by *his* hands, and not so much as to mention any other name? Were all the rest of the Apostles mere *concurring* spectators, and not real ordainers, as before pleaded? Then it must follow, not only that *Paul* claimed a superiority over his brethren, which was never heard of before; but also that one *Bishop* is sufficient for the regular ordination of another *Bishop*, which is opposed to every principle of Episcopal government, as well as to the established canons, so far as I know, of every Church on earth.

Finally, it has been urged by some, against this instance of Presbyterian ordination, that the word here translated *Presbytery*, signifies the *office* conferred, and not the *body of ministers* who conferred it. Though this construction of the passage has been adopted by some respectable names\*, it is so absurd and unnatural, and so totally inconsistent with every rational principle of interpretation, that it scarcely deserves a serious refutation. Let us see how the text will read with this meaning attached to the word in question. *Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of thine office.* If this be not nonsense, it is difficult to say what deserves that name. But suppose we make such a monstrous inversion of the whole passage as no rule of grammar will justify, and read it thus—*Neglect not the gift of the Presbyterate which is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of hands.* It will then follow, that

\* Among these names, that of the great and venerable Calvin appears, who, when he wrote his *Institutes*, adopted this unnatural sense, and expressed himself in the following terms—*“Quod de impositione manuum Presbyterii dicitur, non ita accipio quasi Paulus de seniorum collegio loquatur; sed hoc nomine ordinationem ipsam intelligo.”* *Instit. lib. iv. cap. 3. sect. 16.* Such an interpretation of a plain passage of scripture, even from so great a man, deserves nothing but ridicule. But Calvin, soon afterwards, when he came to write his *Commentary*, and when his judgment was more mature, gave a very different opinion. *“Presbyterium.] Qui hic collectivum nomen esse putant, pro collegio Presbyterorum positum, recte sentiunt meo iudicio.”* *Comment. in loc.*

the office conferred upon *Timothy* was the *Presbyterate*, or the office of *Presbyter*; but this, while it entirely coincides with the Presbyterian doctrine, will prove fatal to the Episcopal scheme, which constantly takes for granted that *Timothy* was not a mere *Presbyter*, but a *diocesan Bishop*.

The last instance that I shall mention of ordination performed by *Presbyters*, is that of *Paul* and *Barnabas*, who, after having been regularly set apart to the work of the ministry themselves, proceeded through the cities of *Lystra*, *Iconium*, &c. And when they had ordained them *Elders* in every Church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed. Our adversaries will perhaps say, that *Paul* alone performed these ordinations, in his apostolic or episcopal character; and that *Barnabas* only laid on hands to express his approbation of what *Paul* did. But the inspired writer, as usual, speaks a different language. He declares that *they*, both of them, ordained. Perhaps it will be said, that *Barnabas* was himself an *Apostle*, as he is so styled, Acts xiv. 14. and that he joined with *Paul* in ordaining *Presbyters*, in virtue of this superior character. We all know that he was not one of the *Apostles*, strictly so called, and, of course, that none of that pre-eminence which belonged to their character can be claimed for him. The word *Apostle* signifies simply a *Messenger*, a person sent. It was in use among the Greeks, and also among the Jews, before the time of Christ. The Jewish

Apostles were assistants to the High Priest in discussing questions of the law ; and were sometimes employed in inferior and secular duties. *Barronii Annales, An. 32.* Accordingly, besides the twelve Apostles appointed by Christ himself, there were, in the primitive Churches, Apostles, or Messengers, chosen either by the Twelve, or by the Churches themselves, to go to distant places, on special services. In this vague and general sense, the word Apostle is repeatedly used in Scripture. In this sense *Barnabas* and *Epaphroditus* are called Apostles. In this sense *John* the Baptist is called an Apostle by *Tertullian*. And in the same sense this name is applied by early Christian writers to the seventy disciples, and to those who propagated the Gospel long after the apostolic age. From this name, then, as applied to *Barnabas*, no pre-eminence of character can be inferred\*. Besides, the supposition that he bore an ecclesiastical rank above that of *Presbyter*, is effectually refuted by the fact that he was himself ordained by the *Presbyters* of *Antioch*. As a *Presbyter*, therefore, he ordained others ; and the only rational construction that can be given to the passage, renders it a plain precedent for Presbyterian ordination.

\* The translators of our Bible very clearly recognize this distinction between the *appropriate* and the *general* sense of the word *Apostle*. Thus in 2 Cor. viii. 23, they render the phrase *αποστολοι εκκλησιων*, *the Messengers of the Churches*. And in Philip ii. 25, they translate the word *αποστολος*, as applied to *Epaphroditus*, *Messenger*.

IV. A fourth source of direct proof in favor of the Presbyterian plan of Church Government, is found in the model of the *Jewish Synagogue*, and in the abundant evidence which the Scriptures afford, that the Christian Church was formed after the same model.

At *Jerusalem* alone, where the Temple stood, were sacrifices offered, and the Mosaic rites observed. But in almost every town and village in *Judea*, Synagogues were erected, like parish Churches of modern times, for prayer and praise; for reading and expounding the Scriptures. The *Temple* worship, as will be afterwards shown, was, throughout, typical and ceremonial, and of course was done away by the coming of Christ. But the *Synagogue* worship was altogether of a different nature. It was that part of the organized religious establishment of the Old Testament Church, which, like the decalogue, was purely moral and spiritual, or at least chiefly so; and, therefore, in its leading characters, proper to be adopted under any dispensation. Accordingly we find that our Lord himself frequented the Synagogues, and taught in them; and that the Apostles, and other Christian Ministers in their time, did the same. It is well known, also, that in the city of *Jerusalem*, where the Gospel first began to be preached, after the resurrection of Christ, and where the New Testament Church was first organized, there were, if we may believe the best writers, nearly *five hun-*

*drud* Synagogues. It is equally certain that the first converts to Christianity were Jews; that they came into the Christian Church with all the feelings and habits of their former connexions, and mode of worship strongly prevalent; and that they gave the Apostles much trouble by their prejudices in favor of old establishments, and against innovation. It was probable, therefore, beforehand, that, under these circumstances, the Apostles, who went so far as to admit circumcision, in particular cases, for the sake of keeping peace with some of the first converts, would make as little change, in converting Synagogues into Christian Churches, as was consistent with the spirituality of the New dispensation. To retain the ceremonial worship of the Temple, they could not possibly consent. To join the Priests in offering up sacrifices, when the great Sacrifice had been already offered up *once for all*; to attend on the typical entrance of the High Priest, once a year, with the blood of the sacrifice, into the *Holy of Holies*, while they were, at the same time, teaching that all these things were done away, and that the great *High Priest of our profession* had finally entered into the holiest of all, even into heaven for us; would have been an inconsistency not to be admitted. But no such inconsistency could be charged against a general conformity to the Synagogue model. And, therefore, as might have been expected, we find that this conformity was actually adopted. This will appear

abundantly evident to every impartial inquirer, by attending to the following considerations\*.

1. The words *Synagogue* and *Church* have the same signification. They both signify an *Assembly* or *Congregation* of people convened for the worship of God; and they both signify, at the same time, the *place* in which the assembly is convened. This community of signification, indeed, is so remarkable, that in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for expressing an *Assembly*, is thirty-seven times rendered *Synagogue* (Συναγωγή) and seventy times translated *Church*, (Εκκλησία), the precise word employed in the New Testament to express a Christian Assembly. In fact, in one instance, a Christian congregation is by an inspired writer denominated a *Synagogue*. The Apostle *James* says—*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly, (in the original your Synagogue) a man with a gold ring, &c.* I am aware that this coincidence in the meaning of these

\* Those who wish to see the evidence, that the Christian Church was formed after the model of the Jewish Synagogue, presented more strongly and fully than is possible in this manual, will do well to consult the learned inquiries on this subject, laid before the public by the celebrated *Selden*, in his work *De Synedriis*; by *Dr. Spencer*, a learned Episcopal divine, in his work, *De Legibus Hebræorum*; by *Dr. Lightfoot*, in his *Horæ Hebraicæ*; by *Grotius* in his *Commentary*; by *Vitringa*, in his profound and able work *De Synagoga Vetere*, and by *Stillingfleet* in his *Irenicum*.

words is not absolutely conclusive; but it is one among the numerous concurring facts which prove that our Lord and his Apostles adopted that language which was familiar to the Jews, and to all who were acquainted with their Scriptures; and especially to those who frequented the Synagogue service.

2. The *mode of worship* adopted in the Christian Church by the Apostles, was substantially the same with that which had been long practised in the Synagogue. In the Synagogue, as we learn from *Maimonides*, and others, divine service was begun by the solemn reading of a portion of Scripture, by a person appointed for that service; to this succeeded an exhortation or sermon, by the *Ruler* of the Synagogue, or *Bishop*, whose office will be hereafter noticed. The sermon being finished, solemn prayers were offered up, by the same Ruler, at the end of which the people said, *Amen*. Now, if we examine the New Testament, and those writings of the primitive Fathers, whose authenticity has never been questioned, we shall find, not only a striking similarity, but almost a perfect coincidence, in the mode of conducting the worship of Christian assemblies. That the ministers of the Christian Church, in like manner, made a practice, in their religious assemblies, of reading the Scriptures, delivering discourses, and offering up solemn prayer, at the close of which the people gave their assent, by saying, *Amen*, is expressly stated in Scripture. And when *Justin*



*Martyr* gives an account of the Christian worship, in his day, it is in the following terms—" Upon the day called Sunday, all the Christians, whether in town or country, assemble in the same place, wherein the commentaries of the Apostles, and the writings of the Prophets, are read, as long as the time will permit. Then the reader sitting down, the President of the Assembly stands up and delivers a sermon instructing and exhorting to the imitation of that which is comely. After this is ended, we all stand up to prayers: prayers being ended, the bread, wine, and water, are all brought forth; then the President again praying and praising according to his ability, the people testify their assent by saying, *Amen.*" Here we see no material difference between the Synagogue and Christian worship, excepting the introduction of the *Lord's Supper* into the latter.

3. The *titles* given to the *officers* of the Synagogue were transferred to the officers of the Christian Church. In every Synagogue, as those who are most profoundly learned in Jewish Antiquities tell us, there were a *Bishop*, a bench of *Elders*, and *Deacons*. The first named of these officers was called indifferently, *Minister*, *Bishop*, *Pastor*, *Presbyter*, and *Angel of the Church*\*. The *Presbyters* or *Elders* in each Synagogue, according to

\* *Maimonides*, the celebrated Jewish Rabbi, who lived in the 12th century, in his learned work, *De Sanhed*, cap. 4. describes the *Bishop* of the Synagogue, as "the *Presbyter* who laboured in the word and doctrine."

some writers, were three, and according to others, more numerous. And the *Bishop* was called a *Presbyter*, because he sat with the *Presbyters* in council, and was associated with them in authority. It is remarkable that all these titles were adopted in the organization of the Christian Church, as will appear, on the slightest perusal of the New Testament. And it is still more remarkable that not only the same variety, but also precisely the same interchange of titles, in the case of the principal officer of the Synagogue, was retained by the Apostles in speaking of the Pastors of Christian congregations.

4. Not only the *titles* of officers, but also their *characters*, *duties*, and *powers*, in substance, were transferred from the Synagogue to the Christian Church. The *Bishop* or *Pastor* who presided in each Synagogue, directed the reading of the Law; expounded it when read; offered up public prayers; and, in short, took the lead in conducting the public service of the Synagogue. This description applies with remarkable exactness to the duties and powers of the Christian *Bishop*. The bench of *Elders* in the Synagogue had entrusted to them the general powers of government and discipline; and in like manner, the *Elders* or *Presbyters*, in the Christian Church are directed to *rule the flock*, and formal directions are given them, for maintaining the purity of faith and practice. The bench of *Elders*, in the Synagogue, was made up of both *clergy* and *laity*, i. e. of those

who were authorized to teach and rule, and of those who only ruled. And accordingly, in the Christian Church we read of Elders who *labour in the word and doctrine*, as well as *rule*; and of other Elders who *rule only*. In the Synagogue the office of the *Deacons* was to collect and distribute alms to the poor, and, when called upon, to assist the *Bishop*, in conducting the public service. In conformity with which, the *Deacons* of the Christian Church are represented, in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, as appointed for the purpose of ministering to the poor, and serving tables.

5. Finally, the *mode of ordaining* officers in the Synagogue was transferred to the Christian Church. In the introduction of men to the ceremonial *Priesthood* of the Jews, or into the offices pertaining to the *Temple* service, there was no such thing, strictly speaking, as ordination. Both the Priests and Levites came to their respective offices by *inheritance*, and were *inducted* or *installed*, simply by being brought before the *Sanhedrim*, and receiving the approbation of that body. But, in the Synagogue service, the officers were solemnly elected, and ordained *by the imposition of hands*. Every *Presbyter*, who had himself been regularly ordained, was authorized to act in the ordination of other *Presbyters*: and to make a valid ordination in the Synagogue, it was necessary that *three* ordainers should be present, and take part in the transaction. In like manner, we learn from the New Testa-

ment, that in apostolic times, as well as ever since, the ministers of the Christian Church were ordained by the *imposition of hands*; that Presbyters, as well as the Apostles themselves, were empowered to ordain; and that in the first ordination of ministers of the Gospel recorded by the inspired writers, there were always a *plurality* of ordainers present, and engaged in the solemnity.

Thus I have given you a very brief sketch of the evidence that Christian Churches were organized by the Apostles, after the model of the Jewish Synagogues. I have shown that the *mode of worship* adopted in the Church, the *titles of her officers*, their *powers, duties*, and *mode of ordination*, were all copied from the Synagogue. This evidence might be pursued much further, did the limits which I have prescribed to myself admit of details. It might easily be shown, that in all those respects in which the service of the Synagogue differed from that of the Temple, the Christian Church followed the former. The Temple service was confined to *Jerusalem*; the Synagogue worship might exist, and did exist wherever there was a sufficient number of Jews to form a congregation. The Temple service was restricted with regard to the *vestments* of its officers; while in the Synagogue there was little or no regulation on this subject. And, finally, it is remarkable, that the mode in which the *Bishop* and *Elders* of each Synagogue were *seated* during the public service, was exactly copied into the Christian assemblies. With regard to

these and many other particulars which might be mentioned, the Christian Churches in primitive times, it is well known, departed from the ceremonial splendor of the Temple, and followed the simplicity of the Synagogue. In fact, there is ample proof, that the similarity between the primitive Christian Churches, and the Jewish Synagogues was so great, that they were often considered and represented by the persecuting Pagans as the same.

Unless I deceive myself, I have now established the four positions which were stated at the beginning of this letter, viz. That the Scriptures contain but one commission for the Gospel ministry, and that there is no evidence of the powers conveyed by this commission being afterwards divided between different orders of ministers:—That the words *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are uniformly used in the New Testament as convertible titles for the same office:—That the same *character* and *powers* are, also, in the sacred writings, ascribed interchangeably to *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, thus plainly establishing their identity of *order* as well as of *name*:—And that the Christian Church was organized by the Apostles, after the model of the Jewish Synagogue, which was undeniably Presbyterian in its form.

These positions thus established, decide the controversy. Such a concurrence of *language* and of *facts* in support of the doctrine of ministerial parity, is at once remarkable and conclusive. I

mean conclusive as to the simple fact, that this was the system adopted in the Apostle's days. With respect to the question, how far the Apostolic model of Church order is unalterably binding in all ages, in all nations, and under all states of society, it is wholly a different inquiry. On this point men equally pious and learned have entertained different opinions. My own opinion on the subject has been expressed in a former letter. But I see not how any one can peruse the New Testament, with an impartial mind, without perceiving that the Presbyterian form of Church government is there distinctly portrayed. This is the "truly primitive and apostolic form." And the more closely we adhere to this form, the more we testify our respect for that system which was framed by inspired men, sanctioned by miraculous powers, and made pre-eminently instrumental, in the midst of a frowning and hostile world, in building up the Church in holiness, through faith, unto salvation.

## LETTER III.

*The Arguments drawn from Scripture in favor of  
Diocesan Episcopacy, stated and examined.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

YOU have seen what the Scriptures declare in support of our doctrine of the Christian Ministry. I might safely rest the cause on this testimony. But as it is my wish to do full justice to our opponents, and not to overlook or suppress a single plea urged by them, which has the most distant appearance of plausibility, I will now proceed, with all the candour I can exercise, to examine the principal arguments in favor of their system, which they suppose are to be found in the word of God.

In examining these arguments, I must again request you to keep steadily in view the doctrine for which our Episcopal brethren contend, and the nature of that proof which it is incumbent on them to adduce. They appeal to Scripture to prove that Bishops are an order of Clergy superior to Presbyters; that their superiority rests on the appointment of Christ; and that with this superior order alone, are deposited all the treasures of ministerial authority and succession. To support such a claim, we demand *express warrant*. We require those who make the appeal, to produce passages of

Scripture which contain direct *precept*, plain undoubted *example*, or at least some established *principle*, from which their conclusion necessarily flows. On a subject so *fundamental* as they represent this to be, we cannot be contented with gratuitous assumptions, or ingenious analogies, which have nothing to support them but human authority. We must have a warrant, decided and clear ; a warrant which would be indubitable and satisfactory, if all books, excepting the Bible, were banished from the Church. Let us see whether our claimants are prepared with testimony of this kind.

I. The first argument urged by the friends of prelacy is, " That, as the Mosaic economy was intended to prefigure the Gospel dispensation, we may reasonably suppose the Christian ministry to be modelled after the *Jewish Priesthood* ; and that, as there were, in the Temple service, an *High Priest*, *Priests*, and *Levites*, so we may consider it as agreeable to the will of Christ, that there should be the corresponding orders of *Bishops*, *Priests*, and *Deacons*, in the New Testament Church."

After the ample proof adduced in the foregoing Letter, that the Christian Church was organized by the Apostles, not after the model of the *Temple*, but of the *Synagogue* service, I might with propriety dismiss this argument, as sufficiently refuted by the establishment of that fact. But as much stress has been laid upon the argument in



question, and as some cautious inquirers may wish to see it further discussed, let us proceed to a more particular examination of its merits.

You will observe the form of this argument. It may "reasonably be supposed" that such a correspondence of orders should exist. But why "suppose" it? Does the Word of God, the great Charter of the Christian Church, say that this is the case? Is there a single passage to be found in the sacred volume, which asserts, or gives the least hint, that such a likeness or analogy either *does*, or *ought* to exist? I will venture to say, there is not. I have met, indeed, with much animated declamation in favor of this analogy, urging it as a "supposeable" thing—as a "reasonable" thing, &c. &c. but I have never yet heard of a single passage of scripture, which is even pretended to teach the doctrine in question. For the general position, that many of the Old Testament institutions had a reference to, and were intended to prefigure New Testament blessings, it will be instantly seen by every discerning reader is nothing to the purpose.

But this is not all. There is not only nothing to be found in Scripture which bears the least appearance of support to this argument; but there is much to be found which contradicts and destroys it. It is impossible to read the New Testament without perceiving, that the Jewish Priesthood was a typical and temporary institution, which had both its accomplishment and its termination in

Christ. This is taught in passages too numerous to be quoted; but, more particularly, at great length, and with irresistible force of argument, in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*\*, in which the sacred writer declares, that since Christ the substance is come, the types which prefigured him are done away; that the Levitical priesthood was chiefly employed in offering sacrifices, and attending on other ceremonial observances of the typical economy, for which there is no place since the great Sacrifice was *offered up once for all*; and that Christ Jesus himself is now *the great High Priest of our profession*. Is it not above measure wonderful, that any who have the Bible in their hands, and profess to make it the rule of their faith, should, in the face of language so explicit and decisive, represent any human officer in the Christian Church as standing in the place of the High Priest under the ceremonial dispensation?

But it will be asked, Do we deny all connexion between the Old and the New Testament dispensations? Do we deny that the types and ceremonies of the Mosaic economy, were a *shadow of good things to come*? By no means. We warmly contend for this connexion. We maintain, with no less zeal than our opponents, that the whole system of typical and figurative observances enjoined upon the Jews, was full of important meaning, and had a pointed reference to Gospel blessings. We agree, also, that the Jewish Priesthood was typical; but

\* See especially the vii. viii. ix. and x. chapters.

of what?—of a mere *human* Priesthood, to be established under the New Testament dispensation? So far from this, that the Apostle in writing to the *Hebrews*, says directly the contrary. He tells us, that, as the sacrifices offered by the priests under the law, prefigured the death of Christ, and could not with propriety be continued after that event had taken place; so the Levitical Priesthood was a type of that divine High Priest, who once offered himself a sacrifice to satisfy offended justice, and entered, *by his own blood, into the holiest of all, even into heaven*. If any insist that, because the ministrations under the law were a *shadow of heavenly things*, we must have a priesthood under the Gospel of similar grades and organization; they are bound, on the same principle, to carry the parallel through, and to maintain the continuance of *sacrifices*, and of many other things connected with the priestly office; and I may venture to affirm, that they will find it quite as easy to make the scriptures speak in favor of the latter as of the former.

Accordingly the words *Priest* and *Priesthood* are never, in one instance, in the New Testament, applied to the ministers of the Christian Church, as such\*. Episcopalians appear to be particularly

\* I am not ignorant that some advocates for this language have contended, that as the word *Priest* is evidently a corruption of the word *Presbyter*; and as the latter is certainly applied to New Testament ministers, the former may be considered as having a kind of scriptural warrant. But this conclusion is founded on a quibble. In the original Hebrew of the

fond of this language. It is frequently introduced into their public forms, and no less frequently used by their standard writers. But they employ it without the smallest countenance from scripture. This is the decided opinion of eminent Episcopal divines. "It is a common mistake," says Dr. (afterwards Bishop) *Stillingfleet*, "to think that the ministers of the Gospel succeed by way of correspondence and analogy to the priests under the law; which mistake hath been the foundation and original of many errors. For when, in the primitive Church, the name of *Priests* came to be attributed to Gospel ministers, from a fair compliance only, (as was then thought) of the Christians, to the name used both among Jews and Gentiles; in process of time corruptions increasing in the Church, those names that were used by Christians, by way of analogy and accommodation, brought in the things themselves principally intended by those names. So by the metaphorical names of *Priests* and *Altars*, at last

Old Testament scriptures, the sacred office of one who ministered in the Temple service, is expressed by a word which, in the Septuagint, is always rendered ἱερεύς. This was the Old Testament word for a *Levitical Priest*. Now this word is never once used in the New Testament to designate a minister of the Christian Church. And accordingly, the translators of our English Bible, faithful to the distinction which they observed to be uniformly kept up in the sacred language, between the ministers of the Temple and those of the Church, uniformly call the former *Priests*, and their office the *priesthood*; while they as uniformly avoid applying these names to the latter, but call them, *Elders, Bishops, Pastors, &c.*

“ came up the *sacrifice of the Mass*; without which they thought the names of Priest and Altar were insignificant.”—*Irenicum*. p. ii. chap. vi. It is also well known that Archbishop *Cranmer*, Bishop *Ridley*, and several other eminently pious reformers of the Church of England, made zealous opposition to the use of the word *Altar*, and the whole system of phraseology connected with it, as a Popish affectation of conformity to the Temple service of the Jews; as utterly unsupported by scripture; and as highly mischievous in its tendency.

No less opposed to this principle is the opinion of Dr. *Haweis*, an Episcopal Divine, expressed in his *Ecclesiastical History*. “ If, says he, the unfounded idea, that Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, were to succeed to the High Priest, Priests, and Levites, were true, we must surely have found some intimation of it in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*. That men of research,” he adds, “ should broach such puerilities is surprising.”

Dr. *Mosheim*\*, in his account of the corruptions which began to creep into the Church, in the *second century*, makes the following remarks. “ The Christian Doctors had the good fortune to persuade the people, that the ministers of the

\* It is generally known that Dr. *Mosheim* was a Lutheran divine, and one of the most learned men of the 18th century. Of the work from which this quotation is made, Bishop *Warburton* expressed himself in the following terms—“ *Mosheim's Compendium is excellent—the method admirable—in short, it is the only one deserving the name of an ecclesiastical history.*”

“ Christian Church succeeded to the character,  
 “ rights, and privileges of the *Jewish priesthood* ;  
 “ and this persuasion was a new source both of  
 “ honors and profits to the sacred order. This  
 “ notion was propagated with industry sometime  
 “ after the reign of *Adrian*, when the second de-  
 “ struction of *Jerusalem* had extinguished among  
 “ the Jews all hopes of seeing their government  
 “ restored to its former lustre, and their country  
 “ arising out of ruins. And accordingly the *Bi-*  
 “ *shops* considered themselves as invested with a  
 “ rank and character similar to those of the *High*  
 “ *Priest* among the Jews, while the *Presbyters*  
 “ represented the *Priests*, and the *Deacons* the  
 “ *Levites*. It is, indeed, highly probable, that  
 “ they who first introduced this absurd comparison  
 “ of offices so entirely distinct, did it rather through  
 “ ignorance and error, than through artifice or de-  
 “ sign. The notion, however, once introduced,  
 “ produced its natural effects ; and these effects  
 “ were pernicious.”

But admitting, for a moment, that the Levitical  
 priesthood is a proper model for the Christian Mi-  
 nistry ; what is the consequence ? It follows inev-  
 itably, that as there was but *one High Priest* over  
 the Jewish Church, so there ought to be but *one*  
*Bishop* over the Christian Church. So far, then,  
 as the argument has any force, it goes to the es-  
 tablishment, not of *diocesan episcopacy*, but of a  
*Pope*, as the sole vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth,  
 and as the proper head of the Church. In fact,

the whole argument is borrowed from the Papists\*, who have made the only rational and legitimate use of it: and, indeed, if the general principle be admitted, I see not how it is possible, in any consistency with the analogy contended for, to stop short of *one Universal Bishop*.

It is evident, then, that this fancied analogy between the Levitical priesthood, and the Christian ministry, is not only destitute of all support from Scripture, but is positively discountenanced and precluded by the New Testament; that if admitted, it would serve the cause of popery, and not that kind of prelacy for which the Church of England, and those of the same sect in this country, contend; and that it is connected with errors, and with a system of language directly cal-

\* I am aware that hints of the least affinity between *Episcopacy* and *Popery*, are highly offensive to the friends of the former, and have been indignantly repelled. I take no pleasure in giving offence; but as the fact in question is certain, however seriously it may be denied; and as it is impossible to do justice to the cause of truth without stating it, I hope to be excused. I have said, that this argument is borrowed from the *Papists*. No one will understand my meaning to be, that the argument was not invented or propagated until Popery had become *full-grown* and *mature*. The contrary is admitted. The Papacy had a *beginning*, as well as a *completion*. It arose so gradually that even candid men will always dispute about the principal dates in its rise, progress, and establishment. My meaning is, that the artful parallel between the Jewish Priesthood and the Christian ministry, was one of the means early employed by ambitious clergymen to increase their power; and has been always used by the Romish Church as *one of the supports of her superstitious system*.

culated to lead men away from the simplicity of the Gospel.

II. Another argument urged by Episcopal writers in favor of their system, is—"That we actually find three distinct orders of Gospel ministers appointed by Christ, or under his authority, viz. *Apostles, the Seventy Disciples, and Deacons*; and that these correspond with the diocesan Bishops, the Presbyters, and the Deacons of their Church."

This argument may appear plausible to those who have looked only at the surface of the subject; but the slightest examination will evince that it is altogether fallacious and nugatory.

Who were the *Seventy Disciples*? They were a set of men sent out on the same errand with the twelve Apostles, and, for aught that appears, were vested with the same powers. They were both commanded to go forth and proclaim, that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*; they were both endowed with the power of working miracles; and no hint is given that the former were inferior to the latter. (Compare *Matth. x.* with *Luke x.*) The truth is, the first commission even of the twelve Apostles was limited and temporary. They were directed *not to go into the way of the Gentiles, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. This commission terminated at the death of Christ; and was, after his resurrection, formally renewed, and made unlimited both with respect to time and



place. But the Seventy Disciples had no such renewal and extension of their commission. They are mentioned but once in the history of our Lord's ministry by the Evangelists; and after his resurrection, not a syllable is said respecting them. Now as the Jewish dispensation did not give place to the Christian until after the death of Christ, it will inevitably follow that the Seventy Disciples were never, strictly speaking, ministers of the Christian Church at all; but only temporary missionaries, and that under the Old Testament dispensation.

The force of this reasoning can only be evaded by supposing, that the first commission given to the Seventy Disciples was unlimited both with respect to its duration and objects. If this were so, then they were superior to the twelve Apostles, whose first commission is acknowledged to have been limited and temporary. But if this were the case, what becomes of the correspondence between their office, and that of Presbyters, whom Episcopalians constantly represent as inferior to Bishops? On the other hand, if the commission of the Seventy were temporary, and not afterwards renewed, then it will follow, that when our Lord ascended to heaven, he left but *one* order of ministers in his Church, which is precisely the fact for which Presbyterians contend. Nay, if the commission of the Seventy were even allowed to be unlimited as to time, yet it was obviously confined to preaching the Gospel among the *Jews*,

and of consequence, has nothing to do with us, who are of the Gentiles. So that whether their commission were permanent or temporary, it affords no aid to the argument for prelacy, but rather opposes and subverts it. Until Episcopalians prove not only that the Seventy Disciples were sent on an inferior ministry, and were vested with inferior powers to those of the twelve ; but also that *their* commission, as well as that of the twelve, was renewed ; and that their Master left them in office when he ascended to heaven—until they prove both these, which they never have done, nor can do, the attempt to derive any aid from this source, in vindicating the doctrine of clerical inferiority, is altogether vain.

In support of the foregoing remarks, it is easy to produce high Episcopal authority. Dr. *Whitby* speaks on the subject in the following terms.—

“ Whereas some compare the Bishops to the Apostles, and the Seventy to the Presbyters of the Church, and thence conclude that divers orders in the ministry were instituted by Christ himself, it must be granted that the ancients did believe these two to be divers orders, and that those of the Seventy were inferior to the order of the Apostles ; and sometimes they make the comparison here mentioned :—But then it must be also granted that this comparison will not strictly hold ; for the Seventy received not their mission as Presbyters do from Bishops, but immediately from the Lord Christ, as well as the

“ Apostles ; and in their first mission were plainly  
“ sent on the same errand, and with the same  
“ powers.”—*Notes on Luke x. 1.*

Bishop *Sage*, a writer still more zealous for diocesan Episcopacy, expresses himself on the same subject, in a manner no less decisive. “ The Apostles,” says he, “ got not their commission to be governors of the Christian Church, till after the resurrection. And no wonder, for this their commission is most observably recorded, *John xx. 21, &c.* No such thing is any where recorded concerning the Seventy. Nothing is more certain than that the commission which is recorded *Luke x.* did constitute them only temporary missionaries, and that for an errand which could not possibly be more than temporary. That commission contains in its own bosom clear evidences, that it did not instal them in any standing office at all, much less in any standing office in the Christian Church, *which was not yet in being* when they got it. Could that commission which is recorded *Luke x.* any more constitute the Seventy standing officers of the Christian Church, than the like commission recorded *Matthew x.* could constitute the Twelve such standing officers ? But it is manifest that the commission recorded *Matthew x.* did not constitute the Twelve governors of the Christian Church ; otherwise what need of a new commission for that purpose after the resurrection ? Presumable, therefore, it is, that the Seventy had

“ no successors, office-bearers in the Christian  
“ Church, seeing it is so observable that they  
“ themselves received no commission to be such  
“ office-bearers\*.”

And as the Seventy Disciples were not permanent ministers, having ceased to be officers in the Church long before *Deacons* were appointed; so it is equally certain, that *Deacons* are not to be considered as an order of clergy at all; and, of course, their office affords no countenance to the notion of different grades among ministers of the Gospel. That *Deacons* are not an order of *clergy*, as our Episcopal brethren make them, and consequently have no right, as such, to preach and baptize, is evident, both from the account of the original institution of the office, and from the subsequent statement of their qualifications, which we find in Scripture. The account of the institution of the office of Deacon is in the following words, Acts vi. 1—6. *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

\* See his *Vindication of the Princip. of the Cyprianick Age.* Chap. vi. Sect. 6.

*But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude : and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch ; whom they set before the Apostles : and, when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* I appeal to every candid reader of this passage, whether it is possible to consider these persons as commissioned to preach the Gospel ? Is there any thing like it mentioned, or hinted at, in the whole account ? Rather, is not the contrary plainly expressed ? Do not the Apostles expressly say, that desiring to give themselves exclusively to prayer and the ministry of the word, they wished to be relieved from the care of the poor, and the service of tables ? Do they not declare, that attending to this secular concern would render it necessary for them to *leave the word of God* ? Are not the *Deacons* expressly said to be appointed *over this secular business* ? And is it credible, after all, that preaching and baptizing, should be, either in part or in whole, their proper employment ? To suppose this is to consider the inspired Apostles of Christ, as speaking and acting with the inconsistency of children. No less decisive is the language of the Apostle *Paul* in stating to *Timothy* the qualifications necessary for this office. In describing the proper qualities of a *Bishop* or *Pastor*, the Apostle had, in a preceding verse, represented *aptness to teach*

as an essential accomplishment ; but when he proceeds to speak of *Deacons*, he gives no hint of any such accomplishment, nor does he once, in the remotest manner, allude to public teaching, or administering either of the sacraments, as a part of their duty.

Episcopalians, indeed, tell us, that *Philip*, one of those who had been made a *Deacon* in *Jerusalem*, is afterwards represented as preaching and baptizing in *Samaria*. And hence they infer that these functions belonged to his office as *Deacon*. But they forget that *Philip* is expressly called (Acts 21) an *Evangelist* ; an office the leading and essential duty of which is preaching the Gospel. The truth is, *Philip*, a short time after being set apart as a *Deacon*, was driven from *Jerusalem*, by persecution ; and being no longer able to fulfil the duties of this office, it is probable that some person residing in that city was chosen his successor, and that he was advanced to the higher office of *Evangelist*, and sent abroad to preach the Gospel. As to *Stephen's* disputing with the opposers of the Christian faith, immediately after being appointed a *Deacon*, it is nothing to the purpose. This was not preaching the Gospel. In fact it was nothing more than every private Christian, in every age, is bound to do when his faith is attacked. Every thing, therefore, found in Scripture on this subject, is opposed to *Deacons* being considered as an order of *Clergy* ; and in favor of their being regarded, as they are in the Presbyterian Church, as offi-

cers whose peculiar business it is to take care of the poor.

Of the three orders, then, contended for in this argument, there remains but *one*, viz. the *Apostles*, who received a permanent commission to be ministers of the Gospel, and who, in this character, are to be considered as having successors. The Seventy Disciples had ceased to exist, as officers in the Church, a considerable time before the *Deacons* were appointed; and it is trampling upon every intimation of Scripture on the subject, to make the latter an order of clergy at all. The favorite Episcopal doctrine, therefore, of clerical imparity, receives not the least countenance from this boasted argument.

It is impossible not to observe the difficulties to which our Episcopal brethren are reduced, in endeavoring to show, on their own principles, that three orders of clergy have been maintained at every period. Considering the twelve Apostles and the Seventy Disciples, as two distinct orders appointed by our Lord before his crucifixion, they have thought themselves bound to find a *third* order, during that period. And what expedient do you suppose they have adopted to make out their beloved number? Why, some of them gravely tell us that Christ himself was one of the orders of Clergy at that time! I will not so far insult your understandings, Brethren, as to attempt a refutation of this idea. But if this were the case, then, to say nothing of other objections, the *Apos-*

*ties* stood in the place of *Presbyters*, which is contrary to the Episcopal system. Besides, where will the zealous advocates for the doctrine of three orders find their favorite number, even on their own principles, immediately after the ascension of Christ, when the *Deacons* had not been appointed, and when we hear no more about the Seventy Disciples?

III. Closely connected with the foregoing argument is another, which is urged with great confidence by many Episcopal writers. It is—"That the Apostles, while they lived, held a station in the Church superior to all other ministers; that *Bishops* are the proper successors of the *Apostles*; and that they hold a corresponding superiority of character and office."

If this argument be examined, it will be found to have no other force than that which consists in a mere gratuitous assertion of the point to be proved.

The ministry of the Apostles was, in some respects, *extraordinary*, and of course terminated with their lives. In other respects, it was *ordinary*, and transmitted to their successors. Considering them in the former light, as men distinguished by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost; as endowed with immediate inspiration, with the knowledge of tongues, with the power of discerning spirits, and working miracles, and of conferring that power on others; and as invested with authority to order every thing relating to the Churches of Christ, under the unerring gui-



dance of the Spirit of God, until the Canon of Scripture, the grand charter and directory of the Church, should be completed—considering them in this character, the Apostles had no successors. They were exalted above all Bishops. The Scriptures give no hint of any class of ministers coming after them, to be endowed with a similar character; and until those who claim something like Apostolic pre-eminence, produce satisfactory testimonials that they possess similar gifts and powers, they must excuse us for rejecting their claims.

Considering the ministry of the Apostles in those respects in which it was ordinary, and perpetual, they had, and still have, successors; and nothing is more easy than to show that these successors consist of all those, without exception, who are empowered to go forth and teach *men the way of salvation, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*; that is, all regular ministers, who are clothed with authority to preach the Gospel and administer sacraments. For it was in immediate connexion with the command to perform these ordinary functions, that the promise, which is considered as constituting the ministerial succession, was given—*Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Could the advocates of Episcopacy, show from Scripture, that the powers possessed by the Apostles were afterwards *divided*; that, while one class of ministers succeeded them in the ordinary duties of preaching and administering sacraments,

another class succeeded them in some higher and more appropriate duties ; their cause would rest on better ground ; but this, as was before observed, can never be proved. There is not a syllable in Scripture that looks like such a *divided* succession ; nor has it ever been so much as pretended that a passage is to be found which gives a hint of this kind. On the contrary, as has been repeatedly before mentioned, the Scriptures uniformly represent preaching the Gospel, and administering Sacraments, as the most important and honorable of all ministerial functions.

Accordingly, when we ask those who adduce this argument, whence they derive the idea that diocesan Bishops peculiarly succeed the Apostles in their Apostolic character, (for this supposition alone is to their purpose), they refer us to no passages of Scripture asserting or even hinting it ; but to some vague suggestions, and allusions of a few of the early Fathers. Now on such a subject, even if the Fathers were unanimous, we might and ought to hesitate, if nothing like what they intimate were to be found in the word of God. But it ought to be known and remembered, that the Fathers contradict one another, and the same Fathers contradict themselves on this subject. Several of them expressly represent *Presbyters* as the successors of the Apostles. Among others, *Ignatius*, than whom no Father is more highly esteemed, or more frequently quoted as an authority by Episcopalians, generally represents *Presbyters* as standing in the place of the Apostles. The follow-

ing quotations are from his far-famed *Epistles*.—  
 “The Presbyters succeed in the place of the bench  
 of the Apostles.”—“In like manner let all reverence the Déacons as Jesus Christ, and the Bishop as the Father, and the Presbyters as the sanhedrim of God, and college of the Apostles.”  
 “Be subject to your Presbyters as to the Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope.” “Follow the Presbytery as the Apostles,” &c. Other quotations from the Fathers might easily be adduced, equally pointed and decisive against the argument in question; but these are reserved for a subsequent letter.

But still the advocates of diocesan Episcopacy ask—“Do not the Apostles, in many passages of the New Testament, manifestly assert their superiority over other ministers? Do we not find them exercising jurisdiction over uninspired pastors; directing them *how to behave themselves in the house of God*; and, in short, authoritatively ordering the conduct of ministers, and the affairs of the Churches? Now, say they, if the Apostles had any successors in the exercise of this general jurisdiction over other ministers, these successors can be no other than our *diocesan Bishops*, who are constituted governors of the inferior clergy; which is precisely the point for which we contend.”—To this reasoning I answer, the Apostles did possess, and did exercise the general power of jurisdiction and superintendency which has been stated. In the infancy of the Church it was necessary that they should do

so. Being under the immediate guidance of the Holy Ghost, they were to the primitive Churches what the New Testament is to us, the only infallible standard. But does it follow that they must have successors in this paramount authority over other ministers, after the sacred Canon was completed, and the reason of their extraordinary powers had ceased? Besides, let us attend to the consequences to which the Episcopal reasoning on this subject will conduct us. The Apostles, it is granted, gave authoritative instruction, or, if you please, exercised jurisdiction over the Churches and Ministers which they had constituted. Among others, this Apostolic authority was exercised over *Timothy, Titus, and Epaphroditus*, whom all Episcopalians consider as *diocesan Bishops*. In fact it would be difficult to select individual ministers over whom Apostolic authority and direction were more remarkably exercised than over these. Now, we ask the advocates of Episcopacy, Was this authoritative control over these Bishops, the exercise of an *ordinary*, or of an *extraordinary* power? If they say, of an *extraordinary* power, then they give up the argument; for, on the same principles, we may and do contend, that the whole jurisdiction of the Apostles over other ministers of the Gospel, arose from their extraordinary character, and the particular situation of the Church, and expired with them. If, on the other hand, they say, that this was the exercise of an *ordinary* power, then it must inevitably follow, that there is

a divine warrant for a permanent order of ministers, in the Christian Church, *superior to Bishops*, and invested with authority over them; thus making *four* instead of *three* orders of clergy. It is not possible to avoid one or the other of these conclusions; and they are equally destructive to the Episcopal system.

Accordingly, the whole argument for the superiority of *Bishops*, drawn from their being considered as the proper and exclusive successors of the Apostles in their official pre-eminence, has been pronounced invalid, and wholly abandoned by some of the most distinguished writers of the Church of England. In this list are found the names of Dr. *Barrow*, Mr. *Dodwell*, Bishop *Hoadly*, and others of equal eminence.

IV. A fourth argument urged by the advocates of Episcopacy, is—"That *Timothy* and *Titus* were " each appointed to the fixed superintendency of a " large diocese, the former over *Ephesus*, the latter " over *Crete*; that the duties required of them, " and the powers vested in them were evidently superior to those of ordinary Presbyters: in a " word, that they were no other than proper *diocesan Bishops*."

This argument is a corner stone of the Episcopal fabric, adduced with much zeal, and relied on with the utmost confidence, by most of the advocates of prelacy.

It is unfortunate, however, that all the premises

from which the conclusion is drawn, are assumed, without any satisfactory, or even plausible evidence. How does it appear that *Timothy* and *Titus* were Bishops, in the Episcopal sense of the word? They are no where, in Scripture, called by this name. *Timothy*, on the contrary, is expressly styled an *Evangelist*. *2 Tim. iv. 5*. And it is probable that *Titus*, being called to similar duties, bore the same character. Now what is meant by an *Evangelist*? He was an officer, says *Eusebius*, appointed "to lay the foundations of the faith in barbarous nations, to constitute them pastors, and having committed to them the cultivating of those new plantations, to pass on to other countries and nations\*."—No description can apply more perfectly to the work assigned to *Timothy* and *Titus*, as every one who looks into the sacred history must instantly perceive. They were not settled pastors, but itinerant missionaries. They sustained no fixed or permanent relation to the Churches of *Ephesus* or *Crete*; and amidst their numerous and almost constant travels, were probably as long, and perhaps longer, in other places than in these. As for *Titus*, *Dr. Whitby* himself acknowledges, that

\* After quoting an authority so often referred to by Episcopalians, and so high in their estimation as that of *Eusebius*, I will add, that the word *Evangelist* is still used in the Presbyterian Church, and with the same sense attached to it as in the days of *Eusebius*. Among us, an ordained minister, who has no pastoral charge, and who itinerates to preach the Gospel in regions which are destitute of it, is called an *Evangelist*.

“ he was only left at *Crete* to ordain elders in every  
 “ city, and to set in order the things that were  
 “ wanting; and that, having done that work, he  
 “ had done all that was assigned him in that sta-  
 “ tion; and, therefore, *St. Paul* sends for him the  
 “ very next year to *Nicopolis*. *Titus* iii. 12.” And  
 with respect to *Timothy*, the same learned Episco-  
 pal writer also confesses, that “ there is no satis-  
 “ factory evidence of his having resided longer at  
 “ *Ephesus*, than was necessary to execute a special  
 “ and temporary mission to the Church in that  
 “ place.” *Preface to his Comment. on Titus*,

Some Episcopalians of slender information have triumphed, because in our common Bibles, at the close of the Second Epistle to *Timothy*, there is a *Postscript*, in the following words—*The second Epistle unto Timatheus, ordained the first Bishop of the Church of the Ephesians, was written from Rome, when Paul was brought before Nero the second time.* And, also, at the close of the Epistle to *Titus*, a similar postscript, importing that *Titus* was the first Bishop of *Crete*. But it is well known, that these postscripts make no part of the sacred text. It is acknowledged, by all learned men, that they were interpolated, by some officious transcribers, more than 400 years after the Christian æra. They are not to be found in any of the oldest and most authentic copies of the original. They are not the same in all the copies in which they are found. They were solemnly excluded from the earliest English translations; and for a long time

after their introduction, they were generally printed in a different type from the inspired text, in order to show that they form no part of the sacred canon. Of course, as all Episcopal writers of respectability acknowledge, they afford no evidence which deserves the least attention in the case before us.

But if there be no evidence that *Timothy* and *Titus* were diocesan *Bishops*, either in the sacred text, or in the spurious interpolations, which, by ignorant persons, have been sometimes mistaken for it; whence, you will ask, has this notion, so confidently maintained by Episcopal writers, taken its rise? It seems to have been first suggested by *Eusebius*, in the 4th century, as a thing which tradition "*reported*" in his day, but of which he found no certain record\*; and after him this tradition has been servilely copied, and assumed as a

\* *Eusebius* says, "It is reported (*ιστορευται*) that *Timothy* was Bishop of *Ephesus*, and *Titus* of *Crete*." This important writer, to whom ecclesiastical historians are so much indebted, frankly confesses that he was obliged to rely much on *tradition*; and that "he could trace no footsteps of other historians going before him, only in a few narratives." *Eusebius* lived in a day when clerical impurity had made considerable progress; and, of course, tradition would be apt to attach the same ideas to the character of a Bishop in the Apostles' days, as actually belonged to it in the fourth century. But let it never be forgotten, that Episcopalians themselves admit, that the title of *Bishop* is applied in Scripture to the *Pastors* of particular congregations.



fact by a succession of writers. Dr. *Whitby*, notwithstanding all his zeal for Episcopacy, speaks on the subject in this manner. "The great controversy concerning this, and the Epistle to Timothy is, whether *Timothy* and *Titus* were indeed made Bishops, the one of *Ephesus*, and the proconsular *Asia*; the other of *Crete*. Now of this matter I confess I can find nothing in any writer of the *first three centuries*, nor any intimation that they bore that name." And afterwards he adds, generally concerning the whole argument— "I confess that these two instances, absolutely taken, afford us no convincing arguments in favor of a settled diocesan Episcopacy, because there is nothing which proves they did or were to exercise these acts of government rather as *Bishops* than as *Evangelists*."

But it is still urged, that some of the powers represented in scripture as given to *Timothy* and *Titus* clearly indicate a superiority of order. Thus *Paul* besought the former to *abide still at Ephesus*, and gave him directions with regard to the selection and ordination of ministers. And he also appointed the latter to *ordain Elders in every city of Crete*, giving him, at the same time, particular instructions as to the manner in which he should exercise his ordaining power, and *set in order the things that were wanting*. "Here," say the advocates for Episcopacy, "we find in fact the pre- eminent powers of *diocesan Bishops* vested in these men; and as long as they possessed the

“ *powers* of Bishops, it is of small moment by what *name* they were called.” But on this argument several remarks immediately occur, which entirely destroy its force.

The *first* is, that even if we allow *Timothy* and *Titus* to have held such a superior ecclesiastical rank, as that for which Episcopalians contend, still no certain argument can be drawn from their case in favor of an established arrangement in the Church. That they sustained a character in some respects *extraordinary*, and were called to act on occasions in some respects out of the *common* course, none will deny. Are we sure that, in these respects, their mission is to be a precedent for us? Because officers of a certain character were sent, on a particular occasion, to organize Churches, and to ordain Ministers, in *Ephesus* and *Crete*, does it follow, upon any principle of legitimate reasoning, that officers of precisely the same character are indispensably *necessary* in *all countries* and in *all ages* to perform a similar service? Because the Apostle *Paul* in fact partook with other ministers in several ordinations, are we to infer that no ordination was valid, while the Apostles lived, unless one of them was present, and participated in the transaction? By no means. We know that the inference would be false. For we read that *Timothy* and *Titus*, who were certainly subordinate to *Paul*, and who received commands and instructions from him as their superior, were sent on an ordaining tour. We read that certain *Prophets* and *Teachers*,

at *Antioch*, such as *Simeon*, *Lucius*, and *Manaen*, who were of a different description of ministers from either of the former, still possessed the ordaining power; and that *Timothy* himself was ordained by the laying on of the hands of *Presbyters*. In short, there are four classes of Gospel ministers, *ordinary* and *extraordinary*, mentioned in the New Testament, viz. *Apostles*, *Evangelists*, *Prophets*, and *Teachers*, or *Presbyters*. These different titles, it is granted, on all hands, were intended to indicate some diversity of station and employment in the Apostolic age. But however they differed among themselves, with respect to their endowments and qualifications, we find that they all possessed alike the power of setting apart others to the work of the ministry, and actually ordained. Nay, an instance precisely in point occurs in the history of the Episcopal Church in the United States. In the consecration of the first Bishops for that Church, the Archbishop of *Canterbury* presided. Yet we all know that the presence and co-operation of the Primate were not *necessary*, either to the validity or regularity of the consecration. Three ordinary Bishops would have done just as well. Yet if some zealous hierarchist, a thousand years hence, should insist, that because he was present, the consecration could not have taken place without him; the argument would have just as much force as that which we are now considering. Yielding the whole fact, then, concerning the character of *Timothy* and *Titus*, for which our Episcopal brethren contend, it

does not afford the least help to their cause. It no more proves that precisely such officers are necessary to the performance of every valid ordination, in every subsequent age, than the consecration of the first High Priest, under the Old Testament dispensation, by *Moses*, rendered it necessary that every succeeding induction of the same officer should be performed by a similar person, and with similar ceremonies; which we know was neither required nor done\*.

But, *secondly*—We utterly deny that *Timothy* was sent to *Ephesus*, and *Titus* to *Crete*, in any such character as our Episcopal brethren claim for them. We have seen that the fact, if admitted, would be useless to their cause. But it is not admitted, and cannot be proved. To say, that the very circumstance of their being sent to ordain ministers, and to organize Churches, shows that they acted in virtue of a superior episcopal character, every discerning reader will perceive is not proof, but merely taking for granted the whole point in dispute. In truth, the whole argument, drawn from the mission of *Timothy* and *Titus*, when carefully analysed, and distinctly stated, amounts to this—“None  
“ but diocesan Bishops, as a superior order of

\* Perhaps it will be objected that this argument proves too much, and may be made, by pressing it a little further, to support the cause of *lay-ordinations*. By no means. For though different descriptions of ministers, both *ordinary* and *extraordinary*, ordained in the days of the Apostles, yet we read of no ordination but what was performed by *ministers* of some kind,

“clergy, have a right to ordain ministers, and organize Churches: but *Timothy* and *Titus*, were sent to perform services of this kind: therefore *Timothy* and *Titus* were diocesan Bishops.” In this syllogism, the major proposition, viz. that which asserts that none but Bishops, as a superior order, can ordain, is taken for granted. But does not every one see that this is precisely the point to be proved? Until this fundamental proposition, then, be first established, the whole argument is such as all logicians agree in stigmatizing as deceptive and worthless.

*Thirdly*—We know not that there were any Church officers ordained, either at *Ephesus* or *Crete*\*, previous to the mission of *Timothy* and *Titus* to those Churches. The advocates for Episcopacy, I know, take the liberty of supposing that there were *Presbyters* already ordained and residing at both those places, before the period in question. And hence they conclude that *Presbyters* were not considered by the Apostle as lawfully vested with the power of ordaining, “or else,” say they, “he would not have thought it necessary to send superior officers so great a distance, to

\* Archbishop *Potter*, one of the great standard authorities among Episcopalians, concedes that we have no reason to believe there were any ministers ordained at *Crete*, prior to the mission of *Titus* to that place. See *Discourse of Ch. Gov.* p. 91, 92, &c. This simple concession, when traced to its legitimate consequences, amounts, so far as *Titus* is concerned, to a surrender of the whole argument.

“perform this work.” But this supposition is made wholly without evidence. The probability is, that there were no such Presbyters prior to the arrival of *Timothy* and *Titus*: and until the friends of Episcopacy prove that there *were*, the whole argument on which they build so much, falls to the ground. The Gospel had, indeed, been preached, and great numbers converted, both at *Ephesus* and *Crete*, a considerable time before; but we have no evidence that any ecclesiastical organization or appointments had, as yet, taken place\*, and if so, then it was surely necessary to send *special* missionaries, to commence ecclesiastical order, where every thing was in a rude and unorganized state: If there were no Presbyters already ordained and residing in those Churches, it is obvious that sending others to perform what was necessary, does not afford the slightest presumption against the ordaining power of Presbyters.

But, *fourthly*—Admitting, for the sake of argument, that there were Presbyters ordained, and residing, both at *Ephesus* and *Crete*, previous to the respective missions of *Timothy* and *Titus*, still no advantage to the Episcopal cause can be derived

\* “One qualification for a Bishop was, that he should not be a *novice*, that is, one *newly* converted; time being required to prove men before they could be intrusted with the care of the Church: and therefore the Apostles used not to ordain ministers in any place before the *second* time of their coming thither.” *Potter's Disc. of Ch. Gov.* p. 91.

from this concession. We learn from the Epistles directed to these Evangelists, that divisions and difficulties existed in both the Churches to which they were sent. Among the Christians at *Ephesus* there had crept in *ravenous wolves*, who annoyed and wasted the flock ; and also some who had *turned aside unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding what they said, or whereof they affirmed*. And, in the Church of *Crete*, it appears, that there were *many unruly and vain talkers, and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision ; who gave heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men that turned from the truth*. Under these circumstances, the pious and benevolent *Paul*, who had laboured so much in those Churches, would naturally feel himself called upon to do something for their relief. But what was to be done ? He was not able, or he did not think proper, to go himself to direct their affairs. He could not send them copies of that sacred Charter, with which the Churches are now furnished, viz. the New Testament, a considerable portion of which was not then in existence. The ministers residing there were probably themselves involved in the disputes and animosities which prevailed ; and, therefore, could not be considered as suitable persons to compose tumults, and to settle differences in which they had taken a part. There was no alternative, but to send *special Missionaries*, immediately empowered by a person of acknowledged

authority, to act in the various exigencies which might arise; to curb the unruly; to reclaim the wandering; to repress the ambition of those who wished to become *teachers*, or to thrust themselves into the *ministry*, without being duly qualified; to select and ordain others, of more worthy character; and in general to *set in order* the affairs of those Churches. Now, as both *Timothy* and *Titus* had been recently with the Apostle, when they set out on their respective missions, it is not to be supposed that the Epistles which we find directed to them, were written solely, or even principally, for their instruction. It is probable that they were rather intended as *credentials*, to be shown to the Churches of *Ephesus* and *Crete*; as means of commanding their *respect* and *obedience* to these missionaries; and, after answering this occasional purpose, to be placed on record in the sacred Canon, to serve as a guide to the Church in every age. Considering the subject in this light, the mere *fact* of these Missionaries being sent to *Ephesus* and *Crete* does not afford even the shadow of ground for ascribing to them the high Episcopal powers, of which so much is said. No reason that deserves to be called even plausible can be urged, for supposing they had any higher character than that of *Presbyters*.

A *fifth* remark, which invalidates the argument under consideration is this. We know not that either *Timothy* or *Titus*, *alone*, ordained a single



Presbyter, at *Ephesus* or *Crete*. The Epistles giving directions with respect to those Churches are, indeed, addressed to the individual Ministers whose names they bear. But this might have been done merely because they were the most conspicuous and able of the Ministers called to act in those departments of the Church. It is evident that some parts of these Epistles were intended to guide the Churches, as well as the Ministers to whom they were sent. Besides, in all the particular instances of ordination which are recorded in the New Testament, we find a *plurality* of ordainers present and officiating. And though we are not formally told, that any other ordainers accompanied *Timothy* and *Titus*, in visiting the Churches to which they were respectively sent; we cannot undertake to affirm that there were none such. Yet the whole force of the Episcopal argument depends upon taking for granted that each of those Missionaries was *alone* vested with the *whole* ordaining and governing power, in the diocese supposed to be assigned him.

In the *sixth* place—With respect to *Timothy*, there is a fact which militates strongly against the argument in question. It is this. If he were ever Bishop of *Ephesus*, it must have been when *Paul's* first Epistle to him was written: for it is in this Epistle alone that the supposed evidence of his Episcopal powers is found. But this Epistle, as the most learned and judicious commentators agree, was written from *Macedonia*, about the year of Christ 58; a short time before the ce-

lebrated interview of *Paul* with the Elders of *Ephesus*, at *Miletus*. This is the date assigned to it by *Athanasius* and *Theodoret*, among the ancients; and by Dr. *Hammond*, the learned *Grotius*, Dr. *Lightfoot*, Dr. *Benson*, Dr. *Doddridge*, Professor *Michaelis*, and other modern critics of equal reputation. Now if *Timothy* were constituted Bishop of *Ephesus* at this period, how came the Apostle *Paul*, a short time afterwards, in his conference with the *Elders* whom he met at *Miletus*, to stile them the *Bishops* of that Church, and to commit to them its government, as we have seen in a former letter?— Was *Timothy*, after holding this office a few months, so soon displaced? Or, if he still bore the office, is it credible that the Apostle should have totally forgotten the circumstance; that he should declare the *Presbyters* of that Church to be its *Bishops*, and charge them to execute episcopal duties; and that, when predicting divisions and heresies which were about to arise among them, he should say nothing of any superior officer, as their spiritual guide, and bond of union? It is not credible. No impartial reader can believe that *Timothy*, at this time, bore any such fixed relation to the Church of *Ephesus* as that for which the friends of prelacy contend.

A seventh remark on this argument, also, deserves attention. *Timothy* and *Titus* are considered by Episcopalians as diocesan Bishops; the former of *Ephesus*, the latter of *Crete*. But it is evident from the New Testament history that neither

of these Ministers was long stationary in any one place. They appear to have been almost constantly itinerating, to preach the Gospel, and organize Churches. With respect to *Timothy*, we find him at one period with *Paul* at *Philippi*, and *Thessalonica*; a little afterwards at *Athens*; then at *Thessalonica* again. Some years after this, we find him successively at *Ephesus*, *Macedonia*, and *Corinth*; then returning to *Ephesus*; soon afterwards re-visiting *Corinth* and *Macedonia*; then going to *Jerusalem*; and, last of all, travelling to *Rome*, where the sacred history leaves him. In like manner, we may trace *Titus* in his successive journies, from *Syria* to *Jerusalem*; thence to *Corinth*; from *Corinth* to *Macedonia*; back again to *Corinth*; thence to the Island of *Crete*; afterwards to *Dalmatia*, and, as some suppose, back again to *Crete*. Does this look like a fixed Episcopal charge? Nothing more unlike it.

Finally—If *Timothy* and *Titus* were diocesan *Bishops*, then the *Apostles* sustained a still higher office. It is evident from the whole tenor of Scripture, that the *Apostolic* character was superior to that of the *Evangelists*: and *Paul*, especially, always addresses *Timothy* and *Titus* in a style of authority. But if this be so, then we have, by divine right, *Archbishops* as well as *Bishops*; that is, four orders of Clergy, instead of three. I know that the advocates of Episcopacy disclaim this consequence. They tell us that there is no divine warrant for more than three orders; and that *Archbi-*

*shops* and *Metropolitans* are only different grades of the same order, resting, not on Divine appointment, but human expediency. But are they consistent with themselves in saying this? They are not. On the one hand, they contend, that the *Apostles* held a station of superiority and government over all other ministers; and this, not on the ground of their *extraordinary* gifts and circumstances; but in virtue of a power which was *ordinary* and *perpetual*, and in which they had successors. On the other hand, the same persons contend, that *Timothy* and *Titus*, though subject themselves to the *Apostles*, possessed, in their turn, an Episcopal superiority and government over the Presbyters of *Ephesus* and *Crete*: and this, not founded on any peculiar occasion or exigency, but on essential and permanent principles, and transmitted to Bishops in all succeeding ages. Here, then, are two grades of Episcopal power; both equally founded on divine right; both superior to Presbyters, yet unequal to each other; running parallel with each other for a number of years before the decease of the Apostles; both resting on principles ordinary and perpetual; both transmitted to successors; both essential to the well-being of the Church. On this principle Episcopalians are driven to the necessity of contending for *two orders of Bishops*, as indispensable in the organization of every Church\*.

\* We avoid the whole of this difficulty by our doctrine. We hold that all the authority over other ministers, with which

If, to avoid this difficulty, they grant, either that the authority of the *Apostles* over *Timothy* and *Titus* was *extraordinary*; or that the authority of *Timothy* and *Titus* over other ministers was so, they instantly surrender one of their boasted arguments for a settled prelacy. But a principle which either proves too much, or leads to absurdity, is false, and of course inadmissible.

In short; when the advocates for diocesan Episcopacy prove, that *Timothy* and *Titus* were sent to *Ephesus* and *Crete* to remain longer, and on a more important errand than to several other Churches which they visited: when they prove that these ministers went to those Churches in a higher character than that of *itinerant Presbyters*: when they prove that each of them ordained, and exercised other Episcopal powers, *alone*, that is, without the presence or aid of colleagues: when they prove that there were *Presbyters* regularly ordained, residing at *Ephesus* and *Crete*, before these *Missionaries* went thither, who might have performed the rite of ordination, supposing *Presbyters* to possess this power: when they prove that *Timothy* and *Titus* ordained, not as *Presbyters*, but in virtue of some superior inherent character; and that, for the purpose of clothing them with this character, they received a new and appropriate

the *Apostles* and *Evangelists* were vested, was *extraordinary*, and *necessarily* arose from the sacred Canon not being yet completed, and the Church not yet settled.

ordination : when they prove these things, the argument under consideration will be of some value. Even then, several essential links in the chain of proof for establishing an *indispensable* and *unalterable divine right*, will be wanting. But, until these leading facts are established, the argument is absolutely worth nothing ; and, after all the changes that may be rung upon it, and all the decorations with which it may be exhibited, it amounts only to a gratuitous assumption of the whole point in dispute.

V. Another argument frequently adduced in favor of diocesan Episcopacy, is founded on the addresses in Rev. ii. and iii. to the *Angels* of the Asiatic Churches. "These *Angels*," say the advocates of prelacy, "were individuals, who presided over the Seven Churches, which are addressed in these chapters ; and who, of course, could be no other than *Bishops*."

On this argument, also, much stress is laid. But, really, its sole merit, as in several preceding cases, consists in confident assertion, and in begging the whole question.

Is it *certain* that by these *Angels* were meant individual ministers ? Some, and, among the rest, very respectable episcopal commentators, have thought that by this word *collective bodies* of pastors were intended. Again ; supposing individuals to be meant, what is there in the word *Angel* which ascertains its meaning to be a diocesan Bishop ?

*Angel* signifies a messenger; and accordingly, some able Episcopal writers have conjectured (and no mortal can do more than conjecture) that the Angels referred to in this passage of Scripture were a kind of itinerant *legates*, or special *missionaries* to the several Churches mentioned in connexion with them. But, admitting that they were resident ministers; perhaps they were Pastors of single congregations; or perhaps they were the *Moderators*\* or *Chairmen* of the respective Presbyteries of *Ephesus*, *Smyrna*, &c. Or, perhaps, in each of those cities, the eldest and most conspicuous Pastor was selected as the medium for addressing the Church of the city in which he lived. I say *perhaps*, for each of these opinions has had its advocates, among Episcopalians, as well as others; and it is impossible to be certain which of them approaches nearest to the truth; or, whether they are not all erroneous. Amidst this total uncertainty, then, is it not abusing the credulity of men, to the last degree, to take the whole question in controversy for granted; to pronounce with confidence that no other than diocesan Bishops could have been intended; and to represent as blinded with prejudice all who do not see and acknowledge this to be the case?

\* Thus, in our Church, when a letter is written to one of our Presbyteries, to that of *New-York*, for instance, it is always addressed, "To the Moderator of the Presbytery of *New-York*."

Let it be remembered, however, that, so far as the insulated word *Angel* carries with it a meaning to us, that meaning is much more favorable to Presbytery than Episcopacy. It was shown in a former letter, that, in every Synagogue among the Jews, there was an officer, who, among other names, was called *the Angel of the Church*. It was also shown that the Synagogue model, particularly with respect to the names and duties of ministers, was adopted in the Christian Church. Now if this reasoning be admitted, we must consider these *angels* as ordinary pastors, addressed either in their individual or collective capacity; probably the latter\*; and the whole strain of the addresses to them serves rather to confirm than invalidate this conclusion.

But we are gravely told, that some of the early Fathers declare, that these Angels were single persons, and *Bishops*. Though this is not that *Scriptural* testimony, which we are now demanding,

\* I am sensible that there is considerable diversity of opinion among Presbyterians, as well as Episcopalians with respect to the character of the Apocalyptic *Angels*. But as the sacred writer gives us no information relative to their character, excepting what may be gathered from the *name*: and as there are at least half a dozen different opinions on the subject, all equally reconcilable with the scriptural representation, it is no wonder that this diversity of opinion should exist. In truth, when thoroughly sifted, the whole argument will be found perfectly nugatory, and to afford no solid evidence in favor of either *Episcopacy* or *Presbytery*.



yet we will admit the fact. Some of the Fathers do say so. And some of the Fathers go further, and tell us that they were *Archbishops*; nay, some of them even go so far as to mention the names of these *Archbishops*; though, unfortunately, they disagree among themselves in making out a list of the names, and, therefore, excite a suspicion that all their testimony on the subject is unworthy of credit. But, further, it is certain that some *other* Fathers, equally entitled to respect, represent these angels, not as individual Bishops, but as *collective bodies*. Now which of these early writers shall we believe? No wise man can be at a loss to answer. Their mutual contradictions teach us to put no confidence in this kind of testimony.

I will only add, that the learned advocate for prelacy, Mr. *Dodwell*, expressly gives up this whole argument. In his book, entitled, *One Priesthood and One Altar*, published in 1688, he expresses the opinion commonly held by episcopal writers, that the Angels of the Seven Asiatic Churches were diocesan Bishops; but in his *Parænesis*, published about twenty years afterwards, he explicitly renounces this opinion; and, while he expresses much uncertainty with respect to the character of these angels, and concedes the impossibility of deciding who they were, he rather intimates his belief that they were *itinerary legates*, sent from *Jerusalem*, answering to the *seven spirits*, mentioned *Zech. iv. 10.* that are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

VI. The last argument deduced by the friends of Episcopacy from Scripture, which appears worthy of notice, is that which is founded on two parallel passages, one in 1 Cor. xii. the other in Ephes. iv. The former is in these words—*And God hath set some in the Church; first, Apostles; secondarily, Prophets; thirdly, Teachers; after that miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.* The latter, as follows—*And he gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, Pastors and Teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, &c.* In these passages, the friends of Episcopacy assure us, there are various orders of Christian Ministers, not only enumerated, but also expressly said to be *set* or fixed in the Church by its great Head. There must, then, say they, be various orders of clergy, by divine appointment, to the end of the world.

But if these passages of Scripture are considered as representing the *ordinary* ministry of the Church, in all ages, they prove by far too much. They prove that every regular Church must have *more than three* orders of clergy: They prove that, among these, there must be *Apostles* and *Prophets*, as well as *Evangelists*, *Pastors*, and *Teachers*: They prove that no true Church is without *miracles*, *gifts of healing*, and *diversities of tongues*: And, if the order of arrangement is that of dignity, they prove that *governing* the Church is among the low-

est grades of ecclesiastical duty. The friends of Episcopacy will, perhaps, say, that some of the offices and gifts here enumerated, were *extraordinary*, and confined to the Apostolic age. This is readily granted. It is too obvious to be denied. But the moment our Episcopal brethren take this ground, they surrender the whole argument founded on these passages. For if *all* the offices enumerated in these passages were not *fixed* in the Church, and if the *whole* enumeration were not intended as a model for us, the *principle* of the argument is abandoned.

But, admitting, for the sake of argument, that the various classes of Gospel ministers here enumerated were all intended to be perpetual in the Church: admitting all the difficulties with respect to *Prophecy* and *Miracles*, which no Church now claims, to be surmounted: and admitting also, that the number of orders enumerated, can, by some process of ecclesiastical arithmetic hitherto unknown, be reduced from *four* or *five* to *three*, the number of which Episcopalians are so fond; there is still an unfortunate circumstance, which effectually deprives them of all benefit from the argument; or rather, which turns it against them. It is this: All the classes or denominations of ministers here enumerated, are represented in the New Testament, as vested with power to *ordain*, and as actually exercising this power. The ordaining power of *Apostles* is disputed by none. *Prophets* and *Teachers*, we have seen, per-

formed an ordination at *Antioch* ; *Timothy* and *Titus*, who were *Evangelists*, exercised the ordaining power at *Ephesus* and *Crete* ; and *Presbyters* ordained *Timothy* to the work of the ministry. Now if these different denominations correspond with the three orders of *Bishops*, *Presbyters*, and *Deacons*, in modern times ; then it follows, that the power of *ordination*, instead of belonging exclusively to the *first* of these three orders, belongs equally to them *all*. A consequence which, though perfectly reconcileable with our doctrine, is absolutely destructive to the Episcopal scheme.

I have now given you, my brethren, a sketch of the strongest arguments deduced from Scripture in favor of Episcopacy, with which I am acquainted. It is for you to judge whether these arguments do really establish the claim which they are intended to support. It is for you to judge whether they give even *probability* to this claim. Above all, it is for you to decide, whether they show that it is a claim of unalterable *divine right*, and its admission *essentially necessary* to the regular organization of the Church, and the valid ministration of the sacraments. For myself, I must conscientiously declare, that the arguments attempted to be drawn from Scripture, in favor of prelacy, do not appear to me to possess the smallest degree of real force ; and that even to concede to them the merit of *plausibility*, is more than an impartial judge would allow. I can truly say, that when I first ap-

proached the investigation of this subject, I expected to find much more in the sacred volume appearing to favor the Episcopal cause, than I have since been able to discover. It did not occur to me as possible, that such confident appeals to Scripture could be continually made on grounds so entirely unsolid. I might have recollected, indeed, the decisive tone with which many ingenious and learned men have resorted to the sacred oracles to establish the supremacy of the *Pope*, and the damning sin of separation from the Church of *Rome*. Nor ought we to be surprised that pious and learned men, of other denominations, should fall into similar mistakes, and express equal confidence of finding support where none is in reality to be found. The late Mr. *Burke* has somewhere said, "Let us only suffer any person to tell us his story—  
"morning and evening but for one twelve-month,  
"and he will become our master." Many zealous advocates of Episcopacy have been so long in the habit of saying, and of hearing it said, that the Scriptures "clearly," "strongly," and "unquestionably" declare in favor of their system; and some of them so little in the habit of reading the refutations of this error, that they unfeignedly believe it, and scruple not to stigmatize all who do not see it, as given up to blindness and prejudice. But, happily, we have the sacred volume in our hands as well as they; and, after the most dispassionate examination, are compelled to pronounce their arguments from Scripture, nugatory; their

confidence totally unwarranted; and the whole system which they profess to found on the word of God, a fabric resting alone on human contrivance.

After this statement, you will not be surprised to learn, that the whole testimony drawn from Scripture, in favor of diocesan Episcopacy, has been pronounced altogether inconclusive, by some of the warmest and ablest friends of that system. The learned *Dodwell*, one of the great oracles of high-churchmen, frankly confesses, that *Bishops*, as a superior order to *Presbyters*, are not to be found in the New Testament; that such an order had no existence until the beginning of the second century; that *Presbyters* were the highest ecclesiastical officers left in commission by the Apostles; and that the first diocesan *Bishops* were ordained by *Presbyters*, the last Apostle having been dead a number of years before this new order was instituted in the Church. And even those who attempt with confidence to found diocesan Episcopacy on the Scriptures, exhibit such contradiction and confusion among themselves, as entirely to invalidate the whole testimony which they would derive from this source. Scarcely any two of their great standard writers can agree upon any one principle of scriptural evidence. And accordingly, you have seen, that all the leading arguments drawn from Scripture in support of Prelacy, have been pronounced wholly untenable, and each in its turn surrendered, by a number of the most pious and learned Divines of the Church of England,

Can Episcopalians, then, complain that we are not convinced by arguments, which some of the most competent judges among themselves have declared to be inconclusive and even frivolous ?

But this is not all : The great body of Episcopal writers, even those who contend most earnestly for the scriptural evidence in their favor, acknowledge, if I mistake not, that their system is not *directly* laid down in the Word of God. In other words, they confess, that the Scriptures, taken absolutely *alone*, will not bear them out in their claims. But they suppose, and insist, that the *facts* which are mentioned in the sacred history, *taken in connexion* with the writings of the *early Fathers*, decidedly support this claim. That is, the New Testament, in its own divine simplicity, is insufficient for their purpose ; but, *explained*, and *aided*, by the writings of fallible men, it declares positively in their favor.

Is it so, then, that a doctrine, held not merely as important, but fundamental ; not merely as fundamental, but essential to the very existence of the Church ; without which her officers are unauthorized, her ministrations invalid, and her sacraments a nullity, cannot be maintained from the Bible alone ? Is it so, that the Great Head of the Church has given us his Word to be a *light to our feet and a lamp to our path* ; that he has denounced the most awful threatenings against those who *add to*, or *take from the words of this book* ; and yet that an article which lies at the foundation of all the interests and hopes

of the Christian Church cannot be directly proved out of that book? What is this but saying, that the Bible is not a Rule either *perfect*, or *sufficient* for the Church? What is this but embracing a principle which makes human testimony co-ordinate with that of God; and which must involve us in all the mazes and uncertainty of *tradition*? But the admission of the principle in question, is not merely taking uncertain and dangerous ground; it is liable to a more serious objection. To say that an article of faith or practice, is essential to the well being of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, and, at the same time, that it cannot be distinctly and satisfactorily proved from Scripture; is, in effect, bringing a charge against the great Head of the Church, which I know the advocates of this position would abhor equally with ourselves; and which is too shocking to be embodied in language.

But the advocates of Epicopacy tell us, that our demand of *express warrant* from Scripture, in this case, will carry us too far. They contend that several articles of Christian belief and practice, generally deemed of great importance, cannot be distinctly proved from Revelation *alone*. And, particularly, they insist, that if we discard *Episcopacy* for want of direct scriptural testimony in its favor, we must, on the same principle, discard *Infant Baptism*, and the *Christian Sabbath*, neither of which, say they, can be fully established on the ground of Scripture, unconnected with the writings of the early Fathers.



To this plea I answer without hesitation, that if it were true that a divine warrant for *Infant Baptism* and the *Christian Sabbath* is not to be found in the Bible; if it were true that they cannot be distinctly supported from the sacred Volume, independent of all other authorities; then we ought instantly to discard them. Under such circumstances, we should be unworthy of the name of Protestants if we retained them an hour. Nor is it any valid apology for the addition of human devices to the institutions of Christ, that other additions stand on the same ground, and are equally indefensible.

But it is *not true* that these important articles of Christian belief and practice, cannot be directly proved from Scripture. And to assert that they stand, in this respect, on a footing with the doctrine of diocesan Episcopacy, is, though certainly not an intended, yet a real and gross imposition on the credulity of mankind. **THE DIVINE RIGHT OF INFANT BAPTISM CAN BE DECIDEDLY AND FULLY PROVED FROM SCRIPTURE ALONE.** We can prove from Scripture, with absolute certainty, the divine right of **INFANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**; and we can prove, from the same source, and with equal certainty, the divine right of **BAPTISM TO ALL CHURCH MEMBERS.** This is warrant as express as could be desired. On these two great facts, as on a rock, the friend of Infant Baptism may stand undaunted and immoveable to the end

of time\*: and he would be able to do this, if every volume in creation, excepting the Bible, were committed to the flames. Scarcely less evident is the scriptural warrant for the *Christian Sabbath*. When we find one day in seven kept by the people of God, as a day of sacred rest, from the creation till the giving of the law by *Moses*: when we find the great principle, that a seventh part of time must be solemnly consecrated to God, explicitly laid down in the Decalogue, and declared to be of universal and perpetual obligation†: when we find the disciples of Christ, after the resurrection of their Lord, invariably convening on the *first day of the week*, for public worship: when we find this day formally and emphatically styled the *Lord's day*: when we find all this in Scripture, could any man doubt of the divine right of the *first day Sabbath*, even if no uninspired author had ever written a line? It is certainly gratifying to find such abundant evidence as we do in favor of both these.

\* These two facts by no means comprise the *whole* of the evidence found in Scripture in favor of *Infant Baptism*. The impartial reader of the sacred oracles will find in them much more to the same effect. But these are sufficient; and constitute, to all intents and purposes, a full and abundant warrant.

† It seems to be taken for granted, by many, that the *fourth* commandment, enjoins the perpetual observance of the *seventh day in order*. This is certainly a mistake. It merely consecrates to God a *seventh part of time*; leaving the precise day in order to be made the subject of after regulation. That this regulation was made we have satisfactory evidence.

ordinances in a number of early and authentic writers ; but we do not stand in need of human testimony. We have a higher and a better warrant. This *alone* we quote, before a Christian tribunal, as conclusive. And when the friends of Episcopacy produce any thing like a similar warrant from Scripture, in behalf of their doctrine, we will believe them.

On the whole, then, brethren, I trust you will find little difficulty in deciding what conclusion ought to be formed concerning a system which cannot claim the least solid scriptural warrant on which to rest ; and which flies to the writings of ~~fallible~~ men to help out its scanty evidence. You will feel no disposition, I hope, to call it by hard names ; or to lead its advocates with reproaches. But you will understand your principles, as Christians and as Protestants, too well to *receive for doctrines the commandments of men* ; or to take ground which will oblige you even indirectly to concede the *imperfection and insufficiency* of the Word of God.

## LETTER IV.

*Testimony of the Primitive Fathers.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

THE most respectable and authentic writers in the Christian Church, who lived during the first four or five centuries after Christ, are emphatically styled, by ecclesiastical historians, *the Fathers*. The writings of these venerable men have been much resorted to in this controversy. Many, even of those who acknowledge the feebleness and insufficiency of the Episcopal arguments from Scripture, believe that the Fathers speak decidedly in their favor. Whatever doubts may attend the evidence in support of their system, drawn from other sources, *here*, they imagine, there can be no question. For the sake of such persons; and to enable you to decide how far many positive declarations which are made by the friends of Episcopacy are entitled to credit, it becomes necessary to inquire what these early writers attest on the subject before us.

I shall not now stay to ascertain what degree of respect is due to the writings of the Fathers in general. It is my duty, however, to state, that we

do not refer to them, in any wise, as a rule either of faith or of practice. We acknowledge the Scriptures *alone* to be such a rule. By this rule, the Fathers themselves are to be tried; and, of course, they cannot be considered, properly speaking, as the Christian's authority for any thing. It is agreed, on all hands, that they are not infallible guides: and it is perfectly well known to all who are acquainted with their writings, that many of them are inconsistent both with themselves, and with one another. We protest, therefore, utterly against any appeal to them as an authority on this subject. *Though they, or an angel from heaven,* should bring us any doctrine, as essential to the order and well-being of the Church, which is not to be found in the Word of God, we are bound by the command of our Master to reject them.

But, as our Episcopal brethren have frequently complained, that we treat the Fathers with too little respect; and even insinuated that we have no way of avoiding the force of their testimony, but by endeavoring to destroy their credibility; I will give as little ground of uneasiness on this head as possible. Waving, therefore, all further discussion of their title to credit, I will cheerfully admit them as credible witnesses with respect to matters of *fact*, which might be supposed to come within their knowledge. On this ground, then, I will join issue with our opponents; and not only admit, but engage to abide by the testimony of their chosen witnesses.

In examining the writings of the Fathers, I shall admit only the testimony of those who wrote within the FIRST TWO CENTURIES. Immediately after this period so many corruptions began to creep into the Church; so many of the most respectable Christian writers are known to have been heterodox in their opinions; so much evidence appears, that even before the commencement of the third century, the Papacy began to exhibit its pretensions; and such multiplied proofs of wide spreading degeneracy crowd into view, that the testimony of every subsequent writer is to be received with suspicion. Besides, if diocesan Episcopacy existed, and were of the fundamental importance that our Episcopal brethren make it to be, we may surely expect to find some reference to it in the records of two hundred years; and especially when we consider that those were years of the greatest simplicity and purity ever known to the Church.

Before we proceed to examine what the Fathers say on this subject, let us be careful to recollect precisely, what our Episcopal brethren contend for, and what they are bound to prove by these witnesses, in order to make good their claims. When they show us passages in which these early writers merely speak of *Bishops*, they seem to imagine that their point is gained: but such passages are, in fact, nothing to their purpose. We do not deny that there were *Bishops* in the Primitive Church: on the contrary, we contend that the word *Bishop* was a title given, in Apostolic times and long af

terwards, to every Pastor of a particular congregation. Again, when they quote passages which barely enumerate *Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons*, as distinct officers in the Church, they can derive no assistance even from these; because there were, doubtless, *Presbyters*, at that time, as well as now, who, though in *full orders*, were not invested with a *pastoral charge*; and who must, therefore, be distinguished from such as were literally *Overseers* or *Bishops* of particular flocks. Besides, we know that there were *Ruling Elders* in the primitive Church; a class of *Presbyters* confessed to be inferior to *Bishops* in their ecclesiastical character. In enumerating Church officers, then, there was frequently a necessity for making the distinction above stated, without in the least favoring the pretended *superiority of order* among those who labored in the word and doctrine. No; the advocates for diocesan Episcopacy, if they would derive any support to their cause from the writings of the Fathers, must do what they have never yet done. They must produce, from those venerable remains of antiquity, passages which prove, either by direct assertion, or fair inference, that the *Bishops* of the Primitive Church were a *distinct order* of Clergy from those *Presbyters* who were authorized to preach and administer sacraments, and superior to them; that these *Bishops*, when they were advanced to this superior office, had a new and distinct *ordination*; that each *Bishop* had under him a number of congregations, with their Pastors, whom he go-

verned; that these Bishops were exclusively invested with the right of *ordaining*, and administering the rite of *confirmation*; and that this kind of Episcopacy was considered, by *the whole primitive Church*, as an institution of Jesus Christ. When any *one* of these facts is fairly proved, from early antiquity, the friends of Presbyterian Church Government will feel as if they had something like solid argument to contend with; but not till then. Now, after having given much close and serious attention to this subject, I can venture to assure you, that in all the authentic writings which have come down to us, of those Fathers who lived within the first *two hundred years* after Christ, there is not a *single sentence* which can be considered, by an impartial reader, as affording the least support to *any one* of these positions.

When you find the friends of Episcopacy asserting that the *Fathers*, in the "plainest terms," "unanimously," and "with one voice" declare in their favor, you would naturally expect to find these early writers saying *much*, and expressing themselves in *decisive* and *unequivocal* language on this subject. But, how will you be surprised to learn, that there is not a single authentic writing extant, composed within the first three hundred years after Christ, that speaks *directly* and *formally* to the purpose, on any one point in this controversy! The *first* writer who undertook to discuss the question, whether *Bishops* and *Presbyters* were distinct in the Apostles' days, was *Jerome*, who lived in the fourth cen-



tury : and how he has decided the question we shall see in the next letter. In all the writings of earlier date, the character and powers of Church officers are mentioned in an indistinct and cursory manner ; frequently by way of remote allusion, so as to leave it doubtful whether they were intended at all ; generally without any apparent design to convey information respecting them ; and always as if the subject were considered by the writers as of minor importance. It is from these *hints, allusions, and occasional intimations*, that we are to deduce the early opinions on the point before us.

Let us make the experiment. Let us bring forward the testimony of these ancient worthies in order. And in doing this, it shall be my aim, not only to adduce those passages which appear favorable to my own cause ; but also faithfully to state the strongest of those which are usually quoted by our Episcopal brethren in support of their claim.

In the catalogue of the Fathers, who say any thing worthy of our attention on this subject, *Clemens Romanus* holds the first place. He lived towards the close of the first century ; had doubtless conversed with several of the Apostles ; and left behind him one *Epistle*, directed to the brethren of the Church at *Corinth*, the authenticity of which is generally admitted. The occasion of the *Epistle* was this. There had been a kind of schism in the Church of *Corinth*, in which the body of the brethren had risen up against their Pastors, and unjustly deposed them. The design of *Clemens* in writing

was to call these brethren to a sense of their duty, and to induce them to restore and obey their Pastors. In this Epistle the following passages are found. "The Apostles, going abroad, preaching through countries and cities, appointed the first fruits of their ministry to be *Bishops* and *Deacons*. Nor was this any thing new; seeing that long before it was written concerning Bishops and Deacons. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place; "I will appoint their Bishops in righteousness and their Deacons in faith\*." Again— "The Apostles knew by our Lord Jesus Christ, that contentions would arise about the name of *Episcopacy*; and, therefore, having a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed persons, as we have before said; and gave direction how, when they should die, other chesen and approved men should succeed in their ministry. Wherefore we cannot think that those may be justly thrown out of their ministry, who were either appointed by

\*Clemens here, no doubt, refers to *Isa. lx. 17.* which in our English Bibles is rendered *I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness*; but which, in the *Septuagint*, with which he was probably most conversant, is interpreted thus — *I will appoint thy rulers in peace, and thy Bishops (ἐπισκοπους) in righteousness.* If we interpret Clemens rigidly, he will stand as an advocate for two orders instead of three. But he, doubtless, only meant to quote this passage as a general promise, that under the New Testament dispensation there should be a regularly organized Church, and proper officers; without undertaking to define either their number or grades.

“ them, or afterwards chosen by other eminent men,  
 “ with the consent of the whole Church. For it  
 “ would be no small sin in us should we cast off  
 “ those from their *Episcopate* (or *Bishoprick*) who  
 “ holily and without blame fulfil the duties of it.  
 “ Blessed are those *Presbyters* who, having finished  
 “ their course, before these times, have obtained a  
 “ perfect and fruitful dissolution. For they have no  
 “ fear lest any one should turn them out of the place  
 “ which is now appointed for them.” And a little  
 afterwards—“ It is a shame, my beloved, yea, a  
 “ very great shame, and unworthy of your Christian  
 “ profession, to hear, that the most firm and ancient  
 “ Church of the Corinthians, should, by one or two  
 “ persons, be led into a sedition against its *Presby-*  
 “ *ters*. Only let the flock of Christ be in peace with  
 “ the *Presbyters* that are set over it. He that shall  
 “ do this, shall get to himself a very great honor in  
 “ the Lord. Do ye, therefore, who first laid the  
 “ foundation of this sedition, submit yourselves to  
 “ your *Presbyters*; and be instructed into repent-  
 “ ance, bending the knee of your hearts.”

*Clemens*, in these passages, evidently represents  
 the Church at *Corinth* as subject not to an Individ-  
 ual, but to a company of persons, whom he calls  
*Presbyters*, or *Elders*. He exhorts the members of  
 that Church to be obedient to these *Presbyters*; and  
 expostulates with them, because they had opposed  
 and ill-treated their *Presbyters*, and cast them out  
 of their *Bishoprick*. This venerable Father gives  
 not the least hint of any distinction between the of-

fice of *Bishop* and *Presbyter*, but plainly represents them as the *same*; nor does he once speak of *three orders* in the Christian ministry. He mentions a plurality of *Bishops* in the same city; nay, he not only represents the great *cities* as being furnished with *Bishops*, but speaks of them as being also appointed in the *country villages*.

Had there been an individual in the Church at *Corinth* vested with the powers of a modern Bishop, could *Clemens*, with any decency have avoided mentioning or alluding to him? Who so proper to settle differences between Presbyters and their people, as the *Bishop*, empowered to rule both? And if the place of such a Bishop were *vacant*, by death, or otherwise, was it not natural for *Clemens* to say something about the appointment of a successor, as the most likely way to restore order in the Church? The single fact of his total silence concerning such an officer, under these circumstances, is little short of conclusive evidence, that the venerable writer knew of no other *Bishops* than the *Presbyters* to whom he exhorted the people to be subject\*.

There is one passage in this Epistle of *Clemens Romanus*, which has been frequently and confident-

\* The learned *Grotius* speaks of it as a proof of the antiquity and genuineness of *Clemens'* Epistle, "that he no where takes notice of that peculiar authority of Bishops, which was first introduced into the Church of *Alexandria*, and from that example into other Churches; but evidently shows, that the Churches were governed by the common council of *Presbyters*, who, by him, and the Apostle *Paul*, are all called *Bishops*."—*Epist: ad Bignon*.

ly quoted by Episcopal writers, as favorable to their cause. It is in these words. " Seeing, then, these things are manifest to us, it will behoove us to take care that we do all things in order, whatsoever our Lord has commanded us to do. And particularly that we perform our offerings and service to God at their appointed seasons; for these he has commanded to be done, not rashly and disorderly, but at certain times and hours. And, therefore, he has ordained, by his supreme will and authority, both where, and by what persons, they are to be performed. They, therefore, who make their offerings at the appointed season are happy and accepted; because, that, obeying the commandments of the Lord, they are free from sin. For the *High-Priest* has his proper services; and to the *Priests* their proper place is appointed; and to the *Levites* appertain their proper ministries; and the lay-man is confined within the bounds of what is commanded to lay-men. Let every one of you, therefore, brethren, bless God in his proper station, with a good conscience, and with all gravity; not exceeding the rule of the service to which he is appointed. The daily sacrifices are not offered every where; nor the peace-offerings; nor the sacrifices appointed for sin and transgression; but only at *Jerusalem*: nor in any place there; but only at the altar before the Temple; that which is offered being first diligently examined by the *High*

“*Priest*, and the other ministers we before mentioned.”

From this allusion to the Priesthood of the Jews, the advocates of Episcopacy infer that *Clemens* intended to exhibit that priesthood as a pattern for the Christian Ministry. But nothing more is necessary to set aside this inference than a little attention to the scope and connexion of the passage. *Clemens* is endeavoring to convince the members of the *Corinthian* Church, of the necessity of submission to their pastors, and of the great importance of ecclesiastical order. For this purpose, in passages a little preceding that which is above quoted, he alludes to the regularity which prevails in the *natural world*, and particularly among the various members of the human body. He refers also to the subordination which is found necessary in *military affairs*; remarking, that some are only common soldiers, some prefects, some captains of fifties, some of hundreds, and some of thousands; every one of whom is bound to keep his own station. And, finally, in the passage under consideration, he calls the attention of those to whom he wrote to the strict order that was observed in the Temple service of the Jews, and especially with respect to the times and circumstances of their offering the commanded sacrifices. Such is the plain and unquestionable scope of the whole passage. Is there any thing here like an intimation of *three orders* in the Christian Ministry? As well might it be contended that *Clemens* would have

the Christian Church organized like an *army*; and that he recommends *four orders* of ministers, corresponding with the four classes of military officers, to which he alludes. How wonderful must be the prejudice that can make this use of an allusion! And, above all, how weak and desperate must be that cause, which cannot be supported but by recurring to such means!

The next early writer, who says any thing on this subject, is *Hermas*. Concerning the life and character of this Father, we have no information. We only know that he left behind him a work entitled *Pastor*, which has come down to our times, and the authenticity of which is generally admitted. It was originally written in Greek; but we have now extant only an old Latin version, of the author or date of which we know nothing. In this work the following passages relating to the ministry are found.

“Thou shalt, therefore, say to those who preside over the Church, that they order their ways in righteousness, that they may fully receive the promise, with much glory.”—Again—“After this, I saw a vision at home, in my own house; and the old woman, whom I had seen before, came to me, and asked me, whether I had yet delivered her book to the *Elders*. And I answered that I had not yet. She replied, thou hast done well; for I have certain words more to tell thee. And when I have finished all the words, they shall be clearly understood by the

“elect. And thou shalt write two books, and  
 “send one to *Clement*, and one to *Grapte*. For  
 “*Clement* shall send it to the foreign cities, be-  
 “cause it is permitted to him to do so. But  
 “*Grapte* shall admonish the widows and orphans.  
 “But thou shalt read in this city *with the Elders*  
 “*who preside over the Church.*” Again—“Hear  
 “now concerning the stones that are in the build-  
 “ing. The square and white stones, which agree  
 “exactly in their joints, are the Apostles, and Bi-  
 “shops, and Doctors, and Ministers, who, through  
 “the mercy of God, have come in, and governed,  
 “and taught, and ministered, holily and modest-  
 “ly, to the elect of God.” Again—“As for  
 “those who had their rods green, but yet cleft;  
 “they are such as were always faithful and good;  
 “but they had some envy and strife among them-  
 “selves, concerning *dignity and pre-eminence.*  
 “Now all such are *vain and without understand-*  
 “*ing*, as contend with one another about these  
 “things. For the life of those who keep the com-  
 “mandments of the Lord, consists in doing what  
 “they are commanded; *not in principality, or in*  
 “*any other dignity.*” Once more—“For what  
 “concerns the tenth mountain, in which were the  
 “trees covering the cattle, they are such as have  
 “believed, and some of them have been Bishops,  
 “that is, *presidents of the Churches.* Then such as  
 “*have been set over inferior ministries, and have*  
 “*protected the poor, and the widows,*” &c.

From one of the foregoing extracts, it is evi-



dent, that *Hermas* resided at *Rome*; that he had a particular reference to the Church in that city; and that the period at which he wrote was, when *Clement*, before mentioned, was one of the *Bishops* or *Presidents* of that Church. From a comparison of these extracts it will also appear, that *Hermas* considered *Bishops* and *Elders* as different titles for the same office. He speaks of *Elders* as *presiding over the Church of Rome*; he represents a *plurality of Elders* as having this *presidency* at the same time; having used the word *Bishops*, he explains it as meaning *those who presided over the Churches*; and immediately after *Bishops*, (without mentioning *Presbyters*,) he proceeds to speak of *Deacons*, that is, those who are intrusted with *the protection of the poor and of widows*.

On one of the passages quoted above, some zealous friends of Episcopacy have laid considerable stress. It is this. "The square and white stones, which agree exactly in their joints, are the *Apostles*, and *Bishops*, and *Doctors*, and *Ministers*, who, through the mercy of God," &c. On this passage, *Cotelerius*, a learned Roman Catholic editor, has the following note. "You have here the distinct orders of the hierarchy, in *Apostles*, in *Bishops*, exercising Episcopacy, in *Doctors*, or *Presbyters*, teaching, and in *Deacons* ministering." In language of the same import, some Protestant friends of prelacy have commented on the passage. It is really amusing to find grave and sober men attempting to make so much

of a passage, in every respect, so little to their purpose. For, to say nothing of the evidently loose and fanciful nature of the whole comparison; it is not a warrant for *three*, but for *four* orders of clergy; and, of course, if it proves any thing, will prove too much for the system of any Protestant Episcopalian.

The Epistle of *Polycarp* to the Church at *Philippi*, written early in the second century, stands next on the roll of antiquity. This venerable martyr, like *Clemens*, speaks of only *two orders* of Church officers, viz. *Presbyters* and *Deacons*\*. He exhorts the Philippians to obey these officers in the Lord. "It behooves you," says he, "to abstain from these things, being subject to the *Presbyters* and *Deacons* as to God and Christ." And again—"Let the *Presbyters* be compassionate and merciful towards all; turning them from their errors; seeking out those that are weak; not forgetting the widows, the fatherless, and the poor; abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unrighteous judgment; not easy to believe any thing against any; not severe in judgment; knowing that we are all debtors in point of law." The word *Bishop* is no where

\* It is worthy of remark, that the Apostle *Paul*, in writing to the same Church about 50 or 60 years before, also speaks of their having only two orders of officers, viz. *Bishops* and *Deacons*. See *Philip. i. 1*. But those whom *Paul* styled *Bishops*, *Polycarp* afterwards calls *Presbyters*.

mentioned in his whole Epistle ; nor does he give the most distant hint as if there were any individual or body of men vested with powers superior to Presbyters. On the contrary, he speaks of the Presbyters as being intrusted with the *inspection* and *rule* of the Church ; for, while, on the one hand, he exhorts the members of the Church to submit to them, he intreats the Presbyters themselves to abstain from unrighteous judgment, and to have no respect of persons.

Perhaps it will be asked, Is not *Polycarp* spoken of, by several early writers as *Bishop of Smyrna* ? And does not this fact alone establish the principle for which Episcopalians contend ? I answer, by no means. *Polycarp* is indeed called by this name. So also is *Clement* called *Bishop of Rome*, and *Ignatius* of *Antioch*. Nor, perhaps, have we any reason to doubt that they were so. But *in what sense* were they *Bishops* ? We say, they were scriptural, primitive Bishops, that is, *Pastors*, or *among the Pastors*, of *particular Congregations*. And in support of this assertion, we produce the testimony of Scripture, and the uniform language of the truly primitive Church. But whatever kind of *Bishop Polycarp* was, we shall presently see that a contemporary Father exhorts him to be *personally acquainted* with every member of his flock ; to seek out *all by name* ; and not to overlook even the *servant men and maids* of his charge. Whether the minister who could do this, was more than the *Pastor*

of a single Congregation, I leave every man of common sense to judge.

The fourth place, in the list of Apostolical Fathers, belongs to *Ignatius*. The *Epistles* which go under the name of this venerable Christian Bishop, have been the subject of much controversy. That some copies of them were interpolated, and exceedingly corrupted, in the dark ages, all learned men now agree\*. And that even the "Shorter Epistles," as published by *Usher* and *Vossius*, are unworthy of confidence, as the genuine works of the Father whose name they bear, is the opinion of many of the ablest and best judges in the Protestant world.

But, instead of entering into this controversy, I will take for granted that the Epistles of *Ignatius* last mentioned (and they alone are now quoted among Protestants) are genuine, and worthy of implicit confidence. On this supposition let us examine them. And I will venture to affirm that instead of yielding to the cause of *diocesan Episcopacy* that efficient support which is imagined, they do not contain a *single sentence* which can be construed in its favor; but, on the contrary, much

\* It is even agreed that some of these interpolations were made with the express view of furnishing support to the ambitious claims of *Bishops*. Speaking of some of the interpolations, Dr. *Hammond*, a zealous Episcopalian, represents them as "immoderate," "extravagant," and "senseless"; and concludes that they are evidently the work of some "impostor."

which can only be reconciled with the primitive, *parochial Episcopacy*, or Presbyterian government, so evidently portrayed in Scripture, and so particularly defined in my first letter.

The following extracts from these *Epistles* are among the strongest quoted by Episcopal writers in support of their cause\*.

*Epistle to the Church of Ephesus. Sect. v.* “ Let  
 “ no man deceive himself; if a man be not  
 “ within the altar he is deprived of the bread of  
 “ God. For if the prayer of one or two be of  
 “ such force, as we are told; how much more  
 “ powerful shall that of the Bishop and the whole  
 “ Church be? He, therefore, that does not come  
 “ together into the same place with it, is proud,  
 “ and has already condemned himself.”

*Epistle to the Church of Magnesia. Sect. 2.* “ See-  
 “ ing then, I have been judged worthy to see you,  
 “ by *Damas*, your most excellent Bishop, and by  
 “ your worthy Presbyters, *Bassus*, and *Apollonius*,  
 “ and by my fellow servant, *Sotio*, the Deacon—I  
 “ determined to write unto you.” *Sect. 6.* “ I ex-  
 “ hort you that ye study to do all things in divine  
 “ concord; your Bishop presiding in the place of  
 “ God; your Presbyters in the place of the coun-  
 “ cil of the Apostles; and your Deacons most dear  
 “ to me, being intrusted with the ministry of Jesus

\* To cut off all occasion of doubt, as to the fairness used in translating these extracts, I think proper to state, that I adopt the translation of Archbishop *Wake*.’

“ Christ, who was with the Father before all ages,  
 “ and appeared in the end to us. Let there be no-  
 “ thing that may be able to make a division among  
 “ you ; but be ye united to your Bishop, and those  
 “ who preside over you, to be your pattern and di-  
 “ rection in the way to immortality.” *Sect. 7.*  
 “ As, therefore, the Lord did nothing without the  
 “ Father, being united to him ; neither by himself,  
 “ nor yet by his Apostles ; so neither do ye any  
 “ thing without your Bishops and Presbyters : Nei-  
 “ ther endeavor to let any thing appear rational to  
 “ yourselves apart ; but being come together into  
 “ the same place, have one common prayer, one  
 “ supplication, one mind ; one hope, in charity,  
 “ and in joy undefiled. There is one Lord Jesus  
 “ Christ, than whom nothing is better. Where-  
 “ fore come ye all together as unto one temple of  
 “ God ; as to one altar ; as to one Jesus Christ ;  
 “ who proceeded from one Father, and exists in  
 “ one, and is returned to one.”

*Epistle to the Trallians. Sect. 2.* “ Whereas ye  
 “ are subject to your Bishop as to Jesus Christ, ye  
 “ appear to me to live not after the manner of men,  
 “ but according to Jesus Christ ; who died for us,  
 “ that so believing in his death, ye might escape  
 “ death. It is therefore necessary, that, as ye do,  
 “ so without your Bishop, you should do, nothing.  
 “ Also be ye subject to your Presbyters, as to the  
 “ Apostles of Jesus Christ our hope, in whom if  
 “ we walk, we shall be found in him. The  
 “ Deacons, also, as being the ministers of the

“mysteries of Jesus Christ, must by all means  
“please all.” *Sect. 7.* “Wherefore guard your-  
“selves against such persons. And that you will  
“do, if you are not puffed up; but continue inse-  
“parable from Jesus Christ our God, and from  
“your Bishop, and from the command of the A-  
“postles. He that is within the altar is pure; but  
“he that is without, that is, that does any thing  
“without the Bishop, and Presbyters, and Dea-  
“cons, is not pure in his conscience.”

*The Epistle to the Church at Smyrna. Sect. 8.*  
“See that ye all follow your Bishop, as Jesus  
“Christ, the Father; and the Presbytery as the  
“Apostles: and reverence the Deacons as the  
“command of God. Let no man do any thing of  
“what belongs to the Church separately from the  
“Bishop. Let that Eucharist be looked upon as  
“well established, which is either offered by the  
“Bishop, or by him to whom the Bishop has given  
“his consent. Wheresoever the Bishop shall ap-  
“pear, there let the people also be: as where Jesus  
“Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is  
“not lawful, without the Bishop, either to baptize,  
“or to celebrate the holy communion. But what-  
“soever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing  
“to God; that so whatever is done, may be sure  
“and well done.” *Sect. 12.* “I salute your very  
“worthy Bishop, and your venerable Presbytery,  
“and your Deacons, my fellow servants; and all  
“of you in general, and every one in particular,  
“in the name of Jesus Christ.”

*Epistle to Polycarp.* “*Ignatius* who is also called *Theophorus*, to *Polycarp*, Bishop of the Church which is at *Smyrna*; their overseer, but rather himself overlooked by God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ: all happiness!”

*Sect. 1.* “Maintain thy place with all care, both of flesh and spirit: Make it thy endeavor to preserve unity, than which nothing is better. Speak to every one as God shall enable thee.” *Sect. 4.*

“Let not the widows be neglected: be thou, after God, their guardian. Let nothing be done without thy knowledge and consent: neither do thou any thing but according to the will of God; as also thou dost with all constancy. Let your assemblies be more full: inquire into all by name: overlook not the men nor maid servants; neither let them be puffed up, but rather let them be more subject to the glory of God, that they may obtain from him a better liberty.” *Sect. 5.* “It becomes all such as are *married*, whether men or women, to come together with the consent of the Bishop; that so their marriage may be according to godliness, and not in lust.”

These are the passages in the *Epistles of Ignatius*, which Episcopal writers have triumphantly quoted, as beyond all doubt establishing their claims. Nothing stronger or more decisive is pretended to be found in these far famed relics of antiquity. Now I ask you, my brethren, whether there is in these extracts, a sentence that can serve their purpose?—Let me again remind you, that



they plead, not for such Bishops as we acknowledge, that is, Pastors of single congregations, each furnished with Elders and Deacons, to assist in the discharge of parochial duties. On the contrary, they plead for *diocesan Bishops*, as a distinct and superior order of clergy, who alone are invested with the right to *govern* the church, to *ordain*, and to *confirm*. But is there a single hint in these extracts which looks as if the Bishops mentioned in them were of a distinct and superior order? Is there a single word said about the powers of *ordaining* and *confirming* being appropriated to these Bishops? Not a syllable that has the most distant resemblance to any thing of this kind is to be found in all the Epistles before us\*. On the contrary, it is evident—

1. That the *Bishop* so frequently mentioned by this venerable Father, is only a *parochial Bishop*, or in other words, the *pastor of a single congregation*. The church of which this Bishop has the care is represented, throughout the Epistles, as coming together to *one place*; as worshipping in *one assembly*; as having *one altar*, or *communion table*; as eating of *one loaf*; having *one prayer*; and, in short, *uniting* in all the acts of solemn wor-

\* Accordingly Dr. (afterwards Bishop) *Stillingfleet* declares—"Of all the thirty-five testimonies produced out of *Ignatius* his Epistles, for Episcopacy, I can meet with but *one* which is brought to prove the *least semblance* of an institution of Christ for Episcopacy, and, if I be not much deceived, the sense of that place is clearly *mistaken*." *Irenicum*.

ship. But all this can only apply to a single congregation. Again, the Bishop here spoken of, is represented as *present with his flock* whenever they come together ; as *conducting their prayers*, and *presiding* in all their public service ; as the only person who was authorized, in ordinary cases, to administer *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper* ; as the person by whom all *marriages* were celebrated ; and whose duty it was to be *personally acquainted* with all his flock ; to take notice, *with his own eye*, of those who were *absent* from public worship ; to attend to the *widows* and the *poor* of his congregation ; to seek out all *by name*, and not to overlook even the *men* and *maid-servants* living in his parish. I appeal to your candor, my brethren, whether these representations and directions can be reasonably applied to any other officer than the **Pastor** of a single church ?

2. It is equally evident, that the *Presbyters* and *Presbytery* so frequently mentioned in the foregoing extracts, together with the *Deacons*, refer to officers which in the days of *Ignatius*, belonged, like the Bishop, to each particular church. Most of the *Epistles* of this Father are directed to particular churches ; and in every case, we find each church furnished with a *Bishop*, a *Presbytery*, and *Deacons*. But what kind of officers were these *Presbyters* ? The friends of prelacy, without hesitation, answer, they were the inferior clergy, who ministered to the several congregations belonging to each of the dioceses mentioned in these *Epistles* ; an

order of clergy subject to the Bishop, empowered to preach, baptize, and administer the Lord's Supper; but having no power to *ordain* or *confirm*. But all this is said without the smallest evidence. On the contrary, the *Presbyters* or *Presbytery* are represented as always *present*, with the Bishop and his congregation, when assembled; as bearing a relation to the same flock equally close and inseparable with its Pastor; and as being equally necessary in order to a regular and valid transaction of its affairs. In short, to every *altar*, or *communion table*, there was one *Presbytery*, as well as one *Bishop*. To suppose then that these Presbyters were the *parish Priests*, or *Rectors* of different congregations, within the diocese to which they belonged, is to disregard every part of the representation which is given respecting them. No; the only rational and probable construction of the language of *Ignatius* is, that each of the particular churches to which he wrote, besides its *Pastor* and *Deacons*, was furnished with a bench of *Elders* or *Presbyters*, some of them, probably, ordained to the work of the ministry\*, and therefore empow-

\* I say some of these *Elders* were *probably* ordained to the work of the ministry, and of course, empowered to preach and administer ordinances: But this is not certain. They might *all* have been *Ruling Elders* for aught that appears to the contrary. For in all these epistles, it is no where said that they either preached or dispensed the sacraments. It cannot be shown then, that *Ignatius*, by his *Presbyters* and *Presbytery*, or *Eldership*, means any thing else than a bench of *Ruling Elders* in each church.

ered to *teach* and administer *ordinances*, as well as rule; and others empowered to *rule* only. The whole strain of these Epistles, then, may be considered as descriptive of Presbyterian government. They exhibit a number of particular churches, each furnished with a *Bishop* or *Pastor*, and also with *Elders* and *Deacons*, to whose respective ministrations every private member is exhorted, as long as they are regular, implicitly to submit\*.

I have been thus particular in attending to the testimony of *Ignatius*, because the advocates of prelacy have always considered him as more decidedly in their favor than any other Father, and have contended for the genuineness of his writings with as much zeal as if the cause of Episcopacy

\* Every regularly organized Presbyterian church has a *Bishop*, *Elders*, and *Deacons*. Of the bench of *Elders*, the *Bishop* is the standing *President* or *Moderator*. Sometimes, where a congregation is large, it has two or more *Bishops*, united in the pastoral charge, and having, in all respects, an official equality. When this is the case, each of the *Bishops* is *President* or *Moderator* of the *Eldership* in turn. In some Presbyterian churches, the *Bishop*, instead of having one or more *Colleagues*, of equal authority and power with himself, has an *assistant* or *assistants*. These assistants, though clothed with the whole ministerial character, and capable, without any other ordination, of becoming pastors themselves; yet as long as they remain in this situation, they bear a relation to the *Bishop* similar to that which *Curates* bear to the *Rector*, in some Episcopal churches; and of course, cannot regularly baptize or administer the Lord's Supper without the concurrence of the *Bishop*. *Ignatius*, therefore, could scarcely give a more perfect representation than he does of Presbyterian government.

were involved in their fate. But you will perceive that these writings, when impartially examined, instead of affording aid to that cause, furnish decisive testimony against it.

*Papias*, Bishop of *Hierapolis*, a city of *Asia*, is said to have been "an hearer of *John*, and a companion of *Polycarp*." He flourished about the year 110 or 115. Some fragments of his writings have been preserved. Out of these, the following passage is the only one that I have been able to find, that has any relation to the subject under debate. It is cited by *Eusebius*, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, lib. iii. cap. 39.

"I shall not think it grievous to set down in writing, with my interpretations, the things which I have learned of the *Presbyters*, and remember as yet very well, being fully certified of their truth. If I met any where with one who had conversed with the *Presbyters*, I inquired after the sayings of the *Presbyters*; what *Andrew*, what *Peter*, what *Philip*, what *Thomas*, or *James* had said; what *John*, or *Matthew*, or any other disciples of the Lord were wont to say; and what *Ariston*, or *John the Presbyter*, said: for I am of the mind that I could not profit so much by reading books, as by attending to those who spake with the living voice."

The only thing remarkable in this passage, is, that the writer, obviously, styles the *Apostles*, *Presbyters*; and this when speaking of them, not with the lightness of colloquial familiarity, but as ora-

cles, whose authority he acknowledged, whose character he revered, and whose sayings he treasured up. Could we have more satisfactory evidence that this title, as employed in the primitive church, was not considered as expressing official inferiority in those to whom it was applied?

*Irenæus*, who was a disciple of *Polycarp*, and who is said to have suffered martyrdom about the year 202 after Christ, is an important and decisive witness on the subject before us. The following passages are found in his writings.

*Book against Heresies, lib. iii. cap. 2.* “When we challenge them (the heretics) to that apostolical tradition which is preserved in the churches through the succession of the *Presbyters*, they oppose the tradition, pretending that they are wiser, not only than the *Presbyters*, but also than the *Apostles*.”

*Lib. iii. cap. 3.* “The apostolic tradition is present in every church. We can enumerate those who were constituted *Bishops* by the *Apostles* in the churches, and their successors even to us, who taught no such thing. By showing the tradition and declared faith of the greatest and most ancient church of *Rome*, which she received from the *Apostles*, and which is come to us through the succession of the *Bishops*, we confound all who conclude otherwise than they ought.”

*Lib. iv. cap. 43.* “Obey those *Presbyters* in the church who have the succession as we have shown from the *Apostles*; who with the succession

“of the *Episcopate*, received the gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father.”

*Lib. iv. cap. 53.* “ True knowledge is the doctrine of the Apostles, according to the succession of *Bishops*, to whom they delivered the church in every place, which doctrine hath reached us preserved in its most full delivery.”

*Lib. iv. cap. 44.* “ We ought, therefore, to adhere to those *Presbyters* who keep the *Apostle's* doctrine, and together with the *Presbyterial* succession, do show forth sound speech. Such *Presbyters* the church nourishes; and of such the Prophet says—I will give them *Princes* in peace, and *Bishops* in righteousness\*.”

“ *Lib. v. cap. 20.* “ These are far later than the *Bishops* to whom the *Apostles* delivered the churches: and this we have carefully made manifest in the third book.”

*Lib. iii. cap. 3.* “ The Apostles, founding and instructing that church, (the church of Rome) delivered to *Linus* the *Episcopate*; *Anacletus* succeeded him; after him *Clemens* obtained the *Episcopate* from the Apostles. To *Clement* succeeded *Evaristus*; to him *Alexander*; then *Sixtus*; and after him *Telesphorus*; then *Hugymus*; after him *Pius*; then *Anicetus*; and when *Soter* had succeeded *Anicetus*, then *Eleutherius* had the *Epis-*

\* It will be observed that *Clement*, in a preceding page, applies this text to the *Bishops* constituted by the Apostles. *Irenaeus* here applies it to *Presbyters*, whom he represents as receiving and conveying the *apostolic* succession.

“ copate in the twelfth place. By *this succession,*  
 “ that tradition in the church, and publication of  
 “ the truth, which is from the Apostles, is come  
 “ to us.”

*Epistle to Victor, then Bishop of Rome\**. “ Those  
 “ *Presbyters* before *Soter*, who governed the church  
 “ which thou, *Victor*, now governest, (the church  
 “ of Rome) I mean *Anicetus, Pius, Hugynus, Te-*

\* *Eusebius* tells us, that the occasion on which *Irenæus* wrote this letter to *Victor*, then Bishop of *Rome*, was as follows. A dispute had arisen about the proper time of celebrating *Easter*. In this dispute the churches of *Asia* took one side, and the western churches another. Both sides declared that they had the most decided apostolical authority in their favor: the former pleading the authority of *John* and *Philip*; and the latter, with equal confidence, adducing *Peter* and *Paul* in justification of their practice. In the progress of this dispute, *Victor*, Bishop of the Romish church, issued letters proscribing the churches of *Asia*, and the neighboring Provinces, and endeavoring to cut them off from the communion of the faithful. Upon this occasion *Irenæus* addressed to him the letter in question, showing him the imprudence and injustice of the step which he had taken. *Eccles. Hist.* 1 lib. v. cap. 24. These facts show, 1. That even in the second century Christians began to teach for doctrines the commandments of men. 2. That even so near the apostolic age, the authority of the *Apostles* was confidently quoted in favor of opposite opinions and practices, plainly showing, how little reliance, in religious controversies, is to be placed on any testimony excepting that of the written Word of God. 3. That as early as the time of *Irenæus*, the principal *Pastor* or Bishop of the church of *Rome* had begun to usurp that pre-eminence, which afterwards attained such a wonderful height; and which all Protestants allow to be totally unscriptural and anti-christian.



“ *Iesphorus*, and *Sixtus*, they did not observe it; “ (he is speaking of the day of keeping *Easter*) “ and those *Presbyters* who preceded you, though “ they did not observe it themselves, yet sent the “ Eucharist to those of other churches who did “ observe it. And when blessed *Polycarp*, in the “ days of *Anicetus*, came to *Rome*, he did not much “ persuade *Anicetus* to observe it, as he (*Anicetus*) “ declared that the custom of the *Presbyters* who “ were his predecessors should be retained.”

*Epistle to Florinus*. “ This doctrine, to speak “ most cautiously and gently, is not sound. This “ doctrine disagreeeth with the church, and bringeth “ such as listen to it into extreme impiety.” (And having mentioned *Polycarp*, and said some things of him, he proceeds:) “ I am able to testify before “ God, that if that holy and apostolical *Presbyter* “ had heard any such thing, he would at once have “ exclaimed, as his manner was, “ Good God! in- “ to what times hast thou reserved me !”

The foregoing extracts comprise every thing material in the writings of *Irenæus* that bears on the subject before us. And I take for granted that no impartial reader can cast his eye on them without perceiving how strongly and unequivocally they support our doctrine. This Father not only applies the names *Bishop* and *Presbyter* to the same persons, but he does it in a way which precludes all doubt that he considers them as only different titles for the same office. That regular *succession* from the Apostles which in one place he ascribes

to *Bishops*, he in another expressly ascribes to *Presbyters*. Nay, he explicitly declares that *Presbyters* received the succession of the *Episcopate*. Those ministers whom he mentions by name as having presided in the church of *Rome*, viz. *Linus*, *Anacletus*, *Clemens*, &c. and whom he in one instance calls *Bishops*, he in another denominates *Presbyters*. In one paragraph he speaks of the apostolic doctrine as handed down through the succession of *Bishops*; in another, he as positively affirms that the same apostolic doctrine is handed down through the succession of *Presbyters*. In short, the *Apostolical succession*, the *Episcopal succession*, and the *Presbyterial succession*, are interchangeably ascribed to the same persons, and expressly represented as the same thing. What could be more conclusive? If this venerable Father had been taking pains to show that he employed the terms *Bishop* and *Presbyter* as different titles for the same office, he could scarcely have kept a more scrupulous and exact balance between the dignities, powers, and duties connected with each title, and ascribed interchangeably to both.

*Irenæus*, we are told, was *Bishop* of the church of *Lyons* in *France*. While he held this station, he was sent by the church of which he was Pastor, on some special ecclesiastical business, to *Rome*. On this mission he carried with him a letter from the *Presbytery* of his church, directed to *Eleutherius*, *Bishop* of *Rome*; in which he is called a *Presbyter*, and in which they style him their brother

and colleague. "Father *Eleutherius*, we wish you health in all things, and always in God. We have requested *Irenæus*, our brother and colleague, to deliver you this letter," &c. Had the title of *Presbyter* imported, at that time, an order distinct from that of *Bishop* and inferior to it, would the writers of this official recommendatory letter, have chosen a subordinate title for a man whom they meant to honor? To use the language of *Bishop Stillingfleet*, "What could any one imagine from this mode of speaking, but that the *Bishop* was nothing but the senior *Presbyter*, or one that had a primacy of order among, but no divine right to a power of jurisdiction over, his fellow *Presbyters*?" *Irenicum*.

*Justin Martyr*, in describing the mode of worship adopted by the Christians in his day, says, "Prayers being ended, bread and a cup of water and wine are then brought to the *President of the brethren*, and he, receiving them, offers praise and glory to the Father of all things, through the name of the Son and the Holy Spirit: and he is long in giving thanks, for that we are thought worthy of these blessings. When he has ended prayer and giving of thanks, the whole people present signify their approbation by saying, *amen*. The *President* having given thanks, and the whole people having expressed their approbation, those that are called among us *Deacons*, distribute to every one of those that are present, that they may partake of the bread and

“ wine and water, for which thanks have been gi-  
 “ ven ; and to those that are not present, they car-  
 “ ry.” And again, a little afterwards, he tells us,  
 “ Upon Sunday, all those who live in cities and  
 “ country-towns, or villages belonging to them,  
 “ meet together, and the writings of the Apostles  
 “ and Prophets are read, as the time will allow.  
 “ And the reader being silent, (or having ended)  
 “ the *President* delivers a discourse, instructing  
 “ and exhorting to an imitation of those things that  
 “ are comely. We then all rise up, and pour out  
 “ prayers. And, as we have related, prayers be-  
 “ ing ended, bread and wine and water are brought,  
 “ and the *President*, as above, gives thanks *accord-*  
 “ *ing to his ability\**; and the people signify their  
 “ approbation, saying, *amen*. Distribution and  
 “ communication is then made to every one that  
 “ has joined in giving thanks ; and to those that  
 “ are absent it is sent by the Deacons. And those  
 “ that are wealthy and willing, contribute according  
 “ to their pleasure. What is collected is deposited

\* This passage is one among the numerous testimonies  
 with which antiquity abounds, that there were no *Forms of*  
*Prayer* used in the primitive church. Each *Pastor* or *Bishop*  
 led the devotions of his congregation *according to his ability*.  
 For the first *three hundred years* after Christ, no trace of pre-  
 scribed *Liturgies* is to be found. The *Liturgies* which go un-  
 der the names of *Peter, Mark, James, Clement, and Basil*,  
 have been given up as forgeries, even by the most respectable  
 Episcopal writers. See *A Discourse concerning Liturgies*, by  
 the Rev. *David Clarkson*, a Presbyterian minister of England,  
 the venerable ancestor of the family of that name in this city.

“ in the hands of the *President*, and he helps the  
 “ orphans and widows, those that are in want by  
 “ reason of sickness, or any other cause; those  
 “ that are in bonds, and that come strangers from  
 “ abroad. He is the kind guardian of all that are  
 “ in want. We all assemble on *Sunday*, because  
 “ God, dispelling the darkness and informing the  
 “ first matter, created the world; and also because,  
 “ upon that day, Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from  
 “ the dead.” *Apol.* 1. p. 95—97.

It is generally agreed, by Episcopal writers as well as others, that the officer several times mentioned in these extracts from *Justin Martyr*, viz. the *President*, was the *Bishop* of the church, whose public service is described. Now as this venerable Father is obviously describing the manner in which each particular congregation conducted its worship in his day, it follows that, in the time of *Justin*, every congregation had its *Bishop*; or, in other words, that this was a title applied in primitive times to the ordinary Pastors of particular churches.

The testimony of *Clemens Alexandrinus*, who flourished at the close of the second century, is likewise in favor of our doctrine concerning the Christian ministry. *Clement* was a *Presbyter* of the church in *Alexandria*, and a prodigy of learning in his day. The following extracts from his writings will enable you to judge in what light he ought to be considered as a witness on this subject.

*Pædagog. lib.* 1. “ We who have rule over the  
 “ churches, are Shepherds or Pastors, after the

“image of the Good Shepherd.” *Ibid. lib. iii.*  
 In proof of the impropriety of women wearing foreign hair, among other arguments, he uses this, “On whom, or what will the *Presbyter* impose his hand? To whom or what will he give his blessing? Not to the woman who is adorned, but to strange locks of hair, and through them to another’s head.” *Ibid.* “Many other commands, appertaining to select persons, are written in the sacred books; some to *Presbyters*, some to *Bishops*, some to *Deacons*, and some to widows.”

*Stromat. lib. i.* “Just so in the church, the *Presbyters* are intrusted with the *dignified* ministry; the *Deacons* with the *subordinate*.” *Ibid. lib. iii.*

Having cited the apostolic directions concerning marriage, in 1 *Tim. v. 14.* &c. he adds, “But he must be the husband of one wife only, whether he be a *Presbyter*, or *Deacon*, or layman, if he would use matrimony without reprehension.”

Again—“What can they say to these things who inveigh against marriage? Since the Apostle enjoins, that the Bishop to be set over the church be one who rules his own house well.”

*Ibid. lib. vi.* “This man is in reality a *Presbyter*, and a true *Deacon* of the purpose of God—not ordained of men, nor because a *Presbyter*, therefore esteemed a righteous man; but because a righteous man, therefore now reckoned in the *Presbytery*; and though here upon earth he hath not been honored with the chief seat, yet he shall sit down among the four and twenty thrones,

“judging the people, as *John* says in the Revelation.” Again, *Ibid.* “Now in the church here, the progressions of *Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons*, I deem to be imitations of the evangelical glory, and of that dispensation which the Scriptures tell us they look for, who, following the steps of the Apostles, have lived according to the Gospel in the perfection of righteousness. These men, the Apostle writes, being taken up into the clouds, shall first minister as *Deacons*, then be admitted to a rank in the *Presbytery*, according to the progression in glory: for glory differeth from glory, until they grow up to a perfect man.” Again—“Of that service of God about which men are conversant, one is that which makes them better; the other ministerial. In like manner in the church, the *Presbyters* retain the form of that kind which makes men better; and the *Deacons* that which is ministerial. In both these ministries, the angels serve God in the dispensation of earthly things.” Again, in his book, *Quis dives salvandus sit*, he has the following singular passage: “Hear a fable, and yet not a fable, but a true story reported of *John* the Apostle, delivered to us, and kept in memory. After the death of the tyrant, when he (*John*) had returned to *Ephesus*, out of the isle of *Patmos*, being desired, he went to the neighboring nations, where he appointed *Bishops*, where he set in order whole cities, and where he chose by lot unto the ecclesiastical function, of those who had

“ been pointed out by the Spirit as by name. When  
 “ he was come to a certain city, not far distant, the  
 “ name of which some mention, and among other  
 “ things had refreshed the brethren ; beholding a  
 “ young man of a portly body, a gracious coun-  
 “ tenance, and fervent mind, he looked upon the  
 “ *Bishop*, who was set over all, and said, I com-  
 “ mit this young man to thy custody, in presence  
 “ of the church, and Christ bearing me witness.  
 “ When he had received the charge, and promised  
 “ the performance of all things relative to it, *John*  
 “ again urged, and made protestation of the same  
 “ thing ; and afterwards departed to *Ephesus*. And  
 “ the *Presbyter*, taking the young man, brought  
 “ him to his own house, nourished, comforted,  
 “ and cherished him ; and at length baptized him.”

From these extracts you will perceive, that *Cle-  
 ment*, though a *Presbyter* of the church of *Alexan-  
 dria*, speaks of himself as one of its *Governors*,  
 and claims the title of a “ *Shepherd or Pastor*, after  
 the image of the Good Shepherd,” a title which  
 the greater part of Episcopal writers acknowledge  
 to have been given in the primitive church to the  
 highest order of ministers. He represents the  
*Presbyters* as intrusted with the *dignified ministry*,  
 and the *Deacons* with the *subordinate*, without sug-  
 gesting any thing of a *more dignified* order. He  
 applies the apostolic direction in 1 *Tim.* ii. 4. in  
 one place to *Bishops* and in another to *Presbyters*,  
 which would have no pertinency if he did not refer  
 in both cases to the same order of ministers. He



compares the grades of church officers with the orders of *angels*; but we read only of *angels* and *archangels*. It is observable also, that the person to whom *John* committed the young man, is in one place called a *Bishop*, and immediately afterwards a *Presbyter*, which we cannot suppose would have been done, had the superiority of order for which prelatists contend, been known in his day. It is further supposed by some, that when *Clement* speaks of *imposition of hands* on the heads of those females who wore false hair, he alludes to the rite of *Confirmation*. If this be so, which is extremely doubtful, it is the first hint we have, in all antiquity, of this rite being practised; but, unfortunately for the Episcopal cause, the imposition of hands here mentioned, is ascribed to *Presbyters*. "On whom or what will the *Presbyter* impose his hand?" From these circumstances, we may confidently infer, that *Clement* knew nothing of an order of *Bishops*, distinct from and superior to *Presbyters*, and that the purity of the apostolic age was not, when he wrote, in this respect, materially corrupted.

It is readily granted, that this Father once speaks of "*Bishops, Presbyters, and Deacons*," and once more, inverting the order, of "*Presbyters, Bishops, and Deacons*." He also represents these as "progressions which imitate the angelic glory," and refers to the "chief seat in the *Presbytery*." But none of these modes of expression afford the least countenance to the Episcopal doctrine. He no where tells us that there was any difference of

order, in his day, between *Bishops* and *Presbyters*; and far less does he convey any hint, that only the former *ordained* and *confirmed*. He says nothing of either of these rites, directly or indirectly, in any of his works. And when the friends of Episcopacy suppose, that the mere use of the words *Bishop* and *Presbyters*, establishes their claim, they only adopt the convenient method of taking the point in dispute for granted, without a shadow of proof. If we suppose the *Bishop* or *Pastor*, alluded to by *Clement*, to be the standing *Moderator* or *Chairman* of the *Presbyters*, belonging to a single congregation, without any superiority of order over such of them as preached and administered ordinances, it will not only account for the strongest expressions above recited; but is, in fact, the only supposition that can be reconciled with the tenor of his writings.

I have now gone through the testimony of those Fathers who lived and wrote within the first *two Centuries* after Christ\*, the limits which I prescribed to myself at the beginning of this letter.

\* The well informed reader will observe, that I have taken no notice of certain writings, called the *Apostolical Canons*, and the *Apostolical Constitutions*, which have been sometimes quoted in this controversy. They are so generally considered as altogether unworthy of credit, that I deem no apology necessary for this omission. When Episcopal writers of the greatest eminence style them "impudent forgeries," and their author "a cheat, unworthy of credit," I may well be excused for passing them by.

And I can solemnly assure you, my brethren, that the foregoing extracts, besides what I have deemed favorable to our own cause, also contain, to the best of my knowledge and belief, *the strongest passages* that are to be found, within that period, in support of diocesan Episcopacy. I may confidently challenge the most zealous Episcopalian to produce, out of the writers of those times, a single sentence which speaks more *fully* or *decidedly* in favor of his system, than those which have been presented. If there be any such, I have not been so fortunate as to meet with them; nor have the ablest Episcopal writers with whom I have been conversant, appeared to know of their existence. You have before you, not merely a *specimen* of those quotations which they consider as most favorable to their cause, but in fact, *the great body* of the strongest and best passages for their purpose, that they are able to produce.

Let me, then, appeal to your candor, whether the assertions made at the beginning of this letter, are not fully supported. Have you seen a single passage which proves that *Christian Bishops*, within the first two centuries, were, in fact, an order of clergy distinct from those *Presbyters* who were authorized to preach and administer sacraments, and superior to them? Have you seen a sentence which furnishes even probable testimony, that these *Bishops* received, as such, a new and superior ordination; that each *Bishop* had under him a number of congregations with their Pastors, whom he

governed; and that with this superior order exclusively was deposited the power of *ordaining* and administering the rite of *Confirmation*? Have you found even *plausible* evidence in support of any one of these articles of Episcopal belief? Above all, have you found *a syllable* which intimates that these were not only *facts*, but also that they were deemed of so much importance as to be essential to the very existence of the church? Even supposing you had found such declarations in *some* or *all* of the early Fathers; what then? *Historic fact* is not *Divine institution*. But have you found the *fact*? I will venture to say, you have not. We are so far from being told by the writers within this period, "with one voice," that *Bishops* are a superior order to preaching *Presbyters*, that not *one* among them says *any thing like it*. Instead of finding them "unanimously," and "constantly" declaring that the right of *Ordination* is exclusively vested in *Bishops* as a superior order, we cannot find a *single passage* in which such information, or any thing that resembles it, is conveyed. And, with respect to *Confirmation*, which is claimed as one of the appropriate duties of the diocesan Bishop, it is not so much as *once mentioned* by any authentic writer, within the first two hundred years, as a ceremony which was *in use at all\**, and much less as appropriated to a particular order of clergy.

\* Unless the doubtful passage before quoted from *Clement's Alexandrines*, may be supposed to refer to this rite;

On the contrary, we have seen that these writers, with remarkable uniformity, apply the terms *Bishop*, *Presbyter*, *President*, *Shepherd*, *Pastor*, interchangeably to the same officers; that the *apostolical succession* is expressly ascribed to *Presbyters*; that a *Bishop* is represented as performing duties which would involve absurdity on any other supposition than that of his being the *Pastor* of a *single flock*; and that in all cases in which any distinction is made between *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, it evidently points out, either the distinction between *preaching* and *ruling* Presbyters; or that between those who were fixed *Pastors* of churches, and those who, though in full orders, and of the same rank, had no pastoral charge, and until they obtained such a place, acted the part of *assistants* to Pastors. In short, when the testimony of the early Fathers is thoroughly sifted, it will be found to yield nothing to the Episcopal cause but simply the title *Bishop*. Now when the advocates of Episcopacy find this title in the New Testament evidently applied to *Presbyters*, they gravely tell us that the mere *title* is nothing, and that the *interchange* of these titles is nothing. But when we find precisely the *same titles* in the early Fathers, and the same *interchange* of these titles, they are compelled either to alter their tone, and to abandon their former reasoning, or else to submit to the mortification of being condemned out of their own mouths.

and if so, then it will follow, from that passage, that, in the days of *Clemens*, *Presbyters* confirmed.

The friends of prelacy have often, and with much apparent confidence, challenged us to produce out of all the early Fathers, a single instance of an *Ordination* performed by *Presbyters*. Those who give this challenge might surely be expected, in all decency and justice, to have a case of *Episcopal* Ordination ready to be brought forward, from the same venerable records. But have they ever produced such a case? They have not. Nor can they produce it. As there is, unquestionably, no instance mentioned in Scripture of any person, with the title of *Bishop*, performing an Ordination; so it is equally certain that no such instance has yet been found in any Christian writer within the *first two centuries*. To find a precedent favorable to their doctrine, the advocates of Episcopacy have been under the necessity of wandering into periods when the simplicity of the Gospel had, in a considerable degree, given place to the devices of men; and when the *man of sin* had commenced that system of unhallowed usurpation, which for so many centuries corrupted and degraded the church of God.

Such is the result of the appeal to the early Fathers. They are so far from giving even a semblance of support to the Episcopal claim, that, like the Scriptures, they every where speak a language wholly inconsistent with it, and favorable only to the doctrine of ministerial parity. What then shall we say of the assertions so often and so confi-

dently made, that the doctrine of a superior order of *Bishops* has been maintained in the church, "from the earliest ages," in "the ages immediately succeeding the apostles," and by "all the fathers, from the beginning?" What shall we say of the assertion, that the Scriptures, *interpreted* by the writings of the *early Fathers*, decidedly support the same doctrine? I will only say, that those who find themselves able to justify such assertions, must have been much more successful in discovering early authorities in aid of their cause, than the most diligent, learned, and keen-sighted of their predecessors.

## LETTER V.

*Testimony of some of the Later Fathers.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

IN citing the Fathers, it was necessary to draw a distinct line between those who are to be admitted as credible witnesses, and those whose testimony is to be suspected. I have accordingly drawn this line at the close of the second century. About this time, as will be afterwards shown, among many other corruptions, that of clerical imparity appeared in the church; and even the Papacy, as we have before seen, had begun to urge its anti-christian claims. From the commencement of the third century, therefore, every witness on the subject of Episcopacy is to be received with caution. As it is granted, on all hands, that the *mystery of iniquity* had then *begun to work*: as great and good men are known, from this time, to have countenanced important errors; errors acknowledged to be such by Episcopalians as well as ourselves: as uncommanded rites and forms, both of Jewish and Pagan origin, began to be introduced into Christian worship, and



to have a stress laid upon them as unreasonable as it was unwarranted ; we are compelled to examine the writers from the commencement of the third century downwards, with the jealousy which we feel towards men who stand convicted of having departed from the simplicity of the gospel ; and concerning some of whom it is perfectly well known, that many of their alleged *facts* are as false as their *principles*.

But though the Fathers from the beginning of the third century are not to be contemplated with the same respect, nor relied upon with the same confidence as their predecessors ; still they deserve much attention ; and in the perusal of their writings, we shall find many passages which confirm the doctrine and the statements exhibited in the foregoing pages. We shall sometimes, indeed, meet with modes of expression and occasional hints, which indicate that the love of pre-eminence, which has so much disturbed the church as well as the state, had begun to form into a system its plans and claims. Not a sentence, however, can be found until the fourth century, which gives any intimation that *Bishops* were considered as a different *order* from *Presbyters* ; or that the former were peculiarly invested with the *ordaining* power. Let us then inquire in what manner some of these later Fathers speak on the subject under consideration.

*Tertullian* began to flourish about the year 200. His writings are voluminous, and their authenticity is generally admitted. And though he has been often quoted by our opponents in this contro-

versy, as a witness favorable to their cause, yet if I mistake not, a little attention to the few hints which he drops on this subject, will show that his testimony is directly of an opposite kind. The following passages are found in his works.

*Apolog.* "In our religious assemblies certain approved *Elders preside*, who have obtained their office by merit, and not by bribes." *De Corona.* "We receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper from the hands of none but the *Presidents* of our assemblies." In the same work, *cap. 3*, he informs us, that the Christians among whom he dwelt, were in the habit of receiving the Lord's Supper *three times in each week*, viz. on *Wednesdays* and *Fridays*, as well as on the *Lord's days*. *Ibid.* "Before we go to the water to be baptized, we first, in the church, under the hand of the *President*, profess to renounce the devil." *De Baptismo.* "It remains that I remind you of the custom of giving and receiving Baptism. The right of giving this ordinance belongs to the highest Priest, who is the *Bishop*; then to *Elders* and *Deacons*; yet not without the authority of the Bishop, for the sake of the honor of the church. This being secured, peace is secured; otherwise, even the *laity* have the right." He then goes on to observe, that although the laity have the right of baptizing in cases of *necessity*; yet that "they ought to be modest, and not assume to themselves the appointed office of the *Bishop*." *De Hæretic.* "Let them

“ (the heretics) produce the original of their  
“ churches; let them turn over the roll of their  
“ Bishops; so running down in a continued suc-  
“ cession, that their first Bishop had some one of  
“ the Apostles, or of the apostolic men (who per-  
“ severed with the Apostles) for his author and  
“ predecessor. Thus the apostolical churches have  
“ their rolls, as the church of *Smyrna* has *Polycarp*  
“ constituted there by *John*, and the church of  
“ *Rome*, *Clement* ordained by *Peter*. And the  
“ other churches can tell who were ordained Bish-  
“ ops over them by the Apostles, and who have  
“ been their successors to this day.”

These quotations are the strongest that Episco-  
pals produce from *Tertullian* in support of their  
system. Let us examine them. This Father  
tells us, that in his day, *Presbyters* presided in  
their assemblies; that the *Presidents* of their as-  
semblies alone, in ordinary cases, *baptized*; and  
that they received the Lord's Supper from no other  
hands but those of the *Presidents*: and at the same  
time he informs us, that administering *baptism* is  
the appropriate right of the *highest Priest*, who is  
the *Bishop*. What are we to infer from this repre-  
sentation, but that *Presbyter*, *President*, and *Bishop*,  
are employed by *Tertullian* as titles of the same  
import? Again; this Father, while he declares that  
each *Bishop* or *President* performed all the Bap-  
tisms for his flock, and that they received the Eu-  
charist from *no other* hands than his, mentions that  
they were in the habit of attending on the Eucha-

rist *three times in each week*. Now the man who performed every Baptism in the church under his care, and who administered the Lord's Supper three times every week to all the members of his church, could only have been the Pastor of one congregation. To suppose that any minister, however great his activity and zeal, could stately perform this service for more than a single church, involves a manifest impossibility. Nor is this all: *absurdity* is added to *impossibility*, by supposing, as Episcopalians must, that the *Bishop* did all this when he had many *Presbyters* under him, who were all invested by the very nature of their office, with the power of administering both sacraments as well as himself.

But it will be asked—why then is the *Bishop* called by *Tertullian* the *highest Priest*? Does not this expression indicate that there was *one Priest* in a church, at that time, who had some kind of *superiority* over the *other Priests* of the same church? I answer, this expression implies no superiority of *order*. The *highest priest* might have been the *standing Moderator* of the *Presbytery*; nor is there any thing in the title inconsistent with this supposition. To draw a conclusion either in favor of diocesan Episcopacy, or against it, from language so entirely ambiguous in its import, is surely more calculated to expose the weakness than to exhibit the strength of the cause in which it is adduced. Besides; *Tertullian* informs us that this *Bishop*, or *highest Priest*, was *alone* invested with the right of

*Baptizing* and administering the *Lord's Supper*; that the *Bishop* might, when he thought proper, empower *Elders* and *Deacons* to *baptize*; and that even *private Christians*, who bore no office in the church, might also baptize in cases of *necessity*. But still he declares that administering baptism was "the appointed office of the *Bishop*," and that they received the *Lord's Supper* from *no other hands* than his. Either, then, *Tertullian* writes in a very confused and contradictory manner, or else both the *Bishop* and *Elders* mentioned by him are officers of a very different character from those who are distinguished by the same titles in modern Episcopal churches. His *highest Priest* was evidently no other than the *Pastor* of a single congregation; the *President* of the assembly, and of the *Presbytery* or *Eldership*, which belonged, like himself, to a particular church.

With respect to the passage quoted above, in which this Father speaks of "the roll of *Bishops*," and of the line of *Bishops* running down in a *continual succession*, it is nothing to the purpose of those who adduce it to support diocesan Episcopacy. What *kind of Bishops* were those of whom *Tertullian* here speaks? If we consider them, as other passages in his writings compel us to consider them, as the *Pastors* of single congregations, then the obvious construction of the passage is perfectly agreeable to Presbyterian principles. But, what establishes this construction is, that *Irenæus*, who

was nearly contemporary with *Tertullian*, in a passage quoted in a preceding page, in a similar appeal to the *heretics*, speaks of the list or roll of *Presbyters*, and represents the *apostolical succession* as flowing through the line of *Presbyters*; an incontestible proof that the words *Bishop* and *Presbyter* were used by both these Fathers, as convertible titles for the same office.

*Cyprian*, the venerable Bishop of *Carthage*, who flourished and wrote about the year 250, is often quoted by Episcopal writers as a strong witness in their favor. The following quotations will show in what light his testimony ought to be viewed.

*Epist. 73.* "Whence we understand, that it is  
 "lawful for none but the *Presidents* of the church to  
 "baptize and grant remission of sins." And again,  
*Epist. 67.* "The people should not flatter them-  
 "selves that they are free from fault, when they  
 "communicate with a sinful *priest*, and give their  
 "consent to the *presidency* of a wicked *Bishop*.  
 "Wherefore a *flock* that is obedient to God's com-  
 "mands, and fears him, ought to separate from a  
 "wicked *Bishop*, and not to join in the sacrifices  
 "of a sacrilegious *priest*; since the flock or people  
 "has the chief power of choosing worthy *priests*  
 "and refusing unworthy ones, which we see comes  
 "down to us from divine authority, that the *priest*  
 "should be chosen in the presence of the flock, and  
 "in the sight of all, that he may be approved as  
 "worthy and fit, by the judgment and testimony of

“ all. This is observed, according to divine au-  
“ thority, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, when *Peter*,  
“ speaking to the people concerning the ordination  
“ of a *Bishop* in the place of *Judas*; it is said *Pe-*  
“ *ter* rose up in the midst of the disciples, the  
“ whole multitude being met together. And we  
“ may take notice that the Apostles observed this  
“ not only in the ordination of Bishops and Priests,  
“ but also of Deacons, concerning whom it is writ-  
“ ten in the *Acts*, that the Twelve gathered together  
“ the whole multitude of the disciples, and said unto  
“ them, &c. which was, therefore, so diligently and  
“ carefully transacted before all the people, lest any  
“ unworthy person should, by secret arts, creep in-  
“ to the ministry of the altar, or the sacerdotal  
“ station. This, therefore, is to be observed and  
“ held as founded on divine tradition and apostolic  
“ practice; which is also kept up with us, and al-  
“ most in all the provinces, that in order to the  
“ right performance of ordination, the neighboring  
“ Bishops of the same province meet with that flock  
“ to which the Bishop is ordained, and that the Bish-  
“ op be chosen in presence of the people, who  
“ know every one’s life, and are acquainted with  
“ their whole conversation. Which we see was  
“ done by you in the ordination of *Sabinus*, our col-  
“ league, that the *Episcopacy* was conferred on him  
“ by the suffrage of the whole brotherhood, and of  
“ the Bishops who were met there, and wrote to  
“ you concerning him.”

*Epist. 32.* “Through all the vicissitudes of time, the ordination of *Bishops*, and the constitution of the church, are so handed down, that the church is built on the *Bishops*, and every act of the church is ordered and managed by them. Seeing, therefore, this is founded on the law of God, I wonder that some should be so rash and insolent as to write to me in the name of the church, seeing a church consists of a *Bishop*; clergy, and all that stand faithful.”

*Tract. De Unitat. Eccles.* “Our Lord speaks to Peter, *I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, &c.* Upon one he builds his church; and though he gave an equal power to all his Apostles, yet that he might manifest unity, he ordered the beginning of that unity to proceed from one Person. The rest of the Apostles were the same that Peter was, being endued with the same fellowship both of honor and power. But the beginning proceeds from unity, that the church may be shown to be one.”

*Epist. 3.* “The Deacons ought to remember, that the Lord hath chosen *Apostles*, that is *Bishops* and *Presidents*; but the Apostles constituted *Deacons*, as the ministers of their Episcopacy and of the church.”

These extracts are remarkable. Though they are precisely those which Episcopalians generally adduce from *Cyprian* in support of their cause; yet the discerning reader will perceive that all their



force lies against that cause. It is evident from these extracts, that *Bishop* and *President* are used by this Father as words of the same import; that the officer thus denominated was the only one who had the power of administering *Baptism*; that the *Bishop* in *Cyprian's* days was chosen by the people of his charge, was ordained over a particular flock, and received his ordination in the presence of that flock. All these circumstances agree perfectly with the Presbyterian doctrine, that the Bishop is the *Pastor* of a single congregation; but wear a most unnatural and improbable aspect when applied to a diocesan Bishop, having a number of flocks or congregations with their Pastors, under his care.

It is readily granted that *Cyprian* speaks of the church of *Carthage* as having several *Presbyters* or *Elders* as well as *Deacons*, and that he distinguishes between the *Presbyters* of that church and himself their *Bishop*. But how many of these were *Ruling Elders*, and how many were empowered to teach and administer *Sacraments*, as well as to rule; and in what respects he differed from the other *Presbyters*, whether only as a standing chairman or moderator among them, as seems to be intimated by his calling them repeatedly his colleagues or co-presbyters, we are no where informed. All we know is, that writing to them in his exile, he requests them, during his absence, to perform his duties as well as their own; which looks as if *Cyprian* considered the *Presbyters* of his church as clothed with full power to perform all those acts which were in-

cumbent on him as *Bishop*, and consequently as of the *same order* with himself.

Again; when *Cyprian* speaks of the church as "being built on the Bishops," and of all the acts of the church as being managed by them, Episcopalians hastily triumph, as if this were decided testimony in their favor. But their triumph is premature. Does *Cyprian*, in these passages, refer to *diocesan* or *parochial* Bishops? To *Prelates*, who had the government of a diocese, containing a number of congregations and their ministers; or to *Pastors* of single flocks? The latter, from the whole strain of his Epistles, is evidently his meaning. He no where gives the least hint of having more than one congregation under his own care. He represents his whole church as ordinarily *joining together* in the celebration of the Eucharist. He declares his resolution to do nothing without the counsel of his *Elders*, and the consent of his *flock*. He affirms that every church, when properly organized, consists of a *Bishop*, *clergy*, and the *brotherhood*. All these representations apply only to *parochial*, and by no means to *diocesan* Episcopacy. For if such officers belong to *every church*, or organized religious society, then we must conclude that by the *clergy* of each church, as distinguished from the *Bishop*, is meant those *Elders* who assisted the Pastor in the discharge of parochial duty, and some of whom, being in full orders, were qualified to preach and administer sacraments. But there is one passage in the above cited extracts, which com-

pletely establishes the position, that *Cyprian* considered *Bishops* and preaching *Presbyters* as of the same order. He recognizes the same kind of pre-eminence in *Bishops* over *Presbyters*, as *Peter* had over the other *Apostles*. But of what nature was this superiority? He shall speak for himself. "The rest of the *Apostles*," says he, "were the same that *Peter* was, being endued with the same fellowship, both of honor and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity, that the church may be shown to be one." In other words, every *Bishop* is of the same order with those *Presbyters* who labor in the word and doctrine; and only holds, in consequence of his being vested with a *pastoral* charge, the distinction of *President* or *Chairman* among them. That I do not mistake *Cyprian's* meaning, you will readily be persuaded, when I inform you that *Mr. Dodwell*, that learned and able advocate for *Episcopacy*, expressly acknowledges, that *Cyprian* makes *Peter* the type of every *Bishop*, and the rest of the *Apostles* the type of every *Presbyter*.

*Firmilian*, *Bishop* of *Cesarea*, who was contemporary with *Cyprian*, in an *Epistle* addressed to the latter, has the following passage. *Cyprian. Epist. 75.* "But the other heretics also, if they separate from the church, can have no power or grace, since all power and grace are placed in the church, where *Elders* preside, in whom is vested the power of baptizing and imposition of hands, and ordination." This passage needs no comment. It

not only represents the right to *baptize* and the right to *ordain* as going together; but it also expressly ascribes both to the *Elders* who preside in the churches.

The testimony of *Jerome* on this subject is remarkably explicit and decisive. This distinguished Father, who flourished about the year 380, and who was acknowledged by the whole Christian world to be one of the most pious and learned men of his day\*, does not merely convey his opinion in *indirect* terms and occasional *hints*, as most of the preceding Fathers had done, but in the most *express* and *formal* manner. In his *Commentary* on *Titus* we find the following passage. "Let us diligently attend to the words of the Apostle, saying, *That thou mayest ordain Elders in every city, as I have appointed thee.* Who discoursing in what follows, what sort of *Presbyter* is to be ordained, saith, *If any one be blameless, the husband of one wife, &c.* afterwards adds, *For a Bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God, &c.* A *Presbyter*, therefore, is the same as a *Bishop*; and before there were, by the devil's instinct, parties in religion, and it was said among the people, *I am of Paul, I of Apollos, and I of Ce-*

\* The celebrated *Erasmus* declared concerning *Jerome*, that "he was, without controversy, the most learned of all Christians, the Prince of divines, and for eloquence that he excelled *Cicero*."

" *phas\**, the churches were governed by the com-  
 " mon council of Presbyters. But afterwards,  
 " when every one thought that those whom he bap-  
 " tised were rather his than Christ's, it was deter-  
 " mined through the whole world, that one of the  
 " Presbyters should be set above the rest, to whom  
 " all care of the church should belong, that the  
 " seeds of schism might be taken away. If any  
 " suppose that it is merely *our* opinion, and not that  
 " of the Scriptures, that Bishop and Presbyter are  
 " the same, and that one is the name of *age*, the  
 " other of *office*, let him read the words of the  
 " Apostle to the *Philippians*, saying, *Paul and Ti-*  
 " *mothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints*  
 " *in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the Bish-*

\* Some Episcopal writers have attempted, from this allu-  
 sion of *Jerome* to 1 Cor. i. 12, to infer that he dates Episco-  
 pacy as early as the dispute at *Corinth*, to which this passage  
 refers. But this inference is effectually refuted by two con-  
 siderations. In the *first* place, *Jerome* adduces proof that  
*Bishop* and *Presbyter* were originally *the same*, from portions  
 of the New Testament which were certainly written *after*  
 the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*. In the *second* place, that  
 language of the Apostle, *one saith I am of Paul, and another,*  
*I am of Apollos, &c.* has been familiarly applied in every  
 age, by way of allusion, to actual divisions in the church.  
 And were those who put the construction on *Jerome* which  
 I am opposing, a little better acquainted with his writings,  
 they would know that in another place he himself applies  
 the same passage to some disturbers of the church's peace  
 in the *fourth* century.

“ *ops and Deacons.* *Philippi* is a city of *Macedonia*,  
 “ and certainly, in one city there could not be  
 “ more than one Bishop, as they are *now* styled.  
 “ But at that time they called the same men *Bishops*  
 “ whom they called *Presbyters*; therefore, he  
 “ speaks indifferently of Bishops as of Presbyters.  
 “ This may seem even yet, doubtful to some, till  
 “ it be proved by another testimony. It is written  
 “ in the Acts of the Apostles, that when the Apos-  
 “ tle came to *Miletus* he sent to *Ephesus*, and called  
 “ the *Presbyters* of that church, to whom, among  
 “ other things, he said, *Take heed to yourselves;*  
 “ and to all the flock over whom the *Holy Ghost* hath  
 “ made you *Bishops*, to feed the church of God which  
 “ he hath purchased with his own blood. Here ob-  
 “ serve diligently, that calling together the *Presby-*  
 “ *ters* of one city, *Ephesus*, he afterwards styles  
 “ the same persons *Bishops*. If any will receive  
 “ that Epistle which is written in the name of *Paul*  
 “ to the *Hebrews*, there also the care of the church  
 “ is equally divided among many, since he writes  
 “ to the people, *Obey them that have the rule over*  
 “ *you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your*  
 “ *souls as those that must give an account, that they*  
 “ *may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is*  
 “ *unprofitable for you.* And *Peter* (so called from  
 “ the firmness of his faith) in his Epistle, saith,  
 “ *The Presbyters which are among you I exhort, who*  
 “ *am also a Presbyter, and a witness of the suffer-*  
 “ *ings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that*  
 “ *shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is*

“ among you, not by constraint but willingly. These things I have written to show, that among the ancients, *Presbyters* and *Bishops* were the same. But, by little and little, that all the seeds of dissension might be plucked up, the whole care was devolved on one. As, therefore, the *Presbyters* know, that by the custom of the church they are subject to him who is their *President*, so let *Bishops* know, that they are above *Presbyters* more by the custom of the church than by the true dispensation of Christ; and that they ought to rule the church in common, imitating *Moses*, who, when he might alone rule the people of Israel, chose seventy with whom he might judge the people.”

In *Jerome's* Epistle to *Evagrius*, he speaks on the same subject in the following pointed language\*,

\* Among the numerous expedients to get rid of this decisive testimony of *Jerome*, one is, to represent that the Epistle to *Evagrius* was written in a fit of passion, in which the worthy Father had particular inducements to magnify the office of *Presbyter* as much as possible. To suppose that a man of *Jerome's* learning and piety, even in a fit of anger, would deliberately commit to writing a doctrine directly opposite to “ the faith of the universal church from the beginning,” and that too on a point of fundamental importance to the very existence of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth; that he should so earnestly insist upon it, and make such formal and solemn appeals to Scripture in support of it, is a supposition which can only be made by those who are driven to the utmost extremity for a subterfuge. But how shall we account for *Jerome's* having maintained the same doctrine, illustrated by the same reasonings, and fortified by the same

" I hear that a certain person has broken out into  
 " such folly that he prefers *Deacons* before *Presby-*  
 " *ters*, that is, before *Bishops*; for when the Apos-  
 " tle clearly teaches that *Presbyters* and *Bishops*  
 " were *the same*, who can endure it that a *minister*  
 " of *tables* and of *widows* should proudly exalt him-  
 " self above those at whose prayers the body and  
 " blood of Christ is made? Do you seek for au-  
 " thority? Hear that testimony—*Paul and Timothy,*  
 " *servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ*  
 " *Jesus that are at Philippi, with the Bishops and*  
 " *Deacons.* Would you have another example?  
 " In the Acts of the Apostles, *Paul* speaks thus to  
 " the priests of one church—*Take heed to yourselves*  
 " *and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath*  
 " *made you Bishops, that you govern the church*  
 " *which he hath purchased with his own blood.* And  
 " lest any should contend about there being a plu-  
 " rality of *Bishops* in one church, hear also another  
 " testimony, by which it may most manifestly be  
 " proved, that a *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are the  
 " same—*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou*  
 " *shouldest set in order the things that are wanting,*  
 " *and ordain Presbyters in every city, as I have ap-*  
 " *pointed thee. If any be blameless, the husband of*  
 " *one wife, &c. For a Bishop must be blameless, as*

Scriptural quotations, in his *Commentary* on *Titus*, before  
 quoted, which must be supposed to have been written with  
 much reflection and seriousness, and which was solemnly  
 delivered as a legacy to the Church, by one of her most il-  
 lustrious ministers;



“steward of God. And to Timothy—Neglect not  
 “the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by  
 “prophecy, by the laying on of the hands of the Pres-  
 “bytery. And Peter also, in his first Epistle, saith,  
 “The Presbyters which are among you I exhort,  
 “who am also a Presbyter, and a witness of the suf-  
 “ferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory  
 “that shall be revealed; to rule the flock of Christ,  
 “and to inspect it, not of constraint, but willingly  
 “according to God; which is more significantly ex-  
 “pressed in the Greek *ἐπισκοποῦντες*, that is, super-  
 “intending it, whence the name of Bishop is drawn.  
 “Do the testimonies of such men seem small to  
 “thee? Let the evangelical trumpet sound, the  
 “son of thunder, whom Jesus loved much, who  
 “drank the streams of doctrine from our Saviour’s  
 “breast. *The Presbyter to the elect Lady and her*  
 “*children, whom I love in the truth.* And in an-  
 “other Epistle, *The Presbyter to the beloved Gaius,*  
 “*whom I love in the truth.* But that one was af-  
 “terwards chosen, who should be set above the  
 “rest, was done as a remedy against schism; lest  
 “every one drawing the church of Christ to him-  
 “self, should break it in pieces. For at Alexandria,  
 “from Mark, the Evangelist, to Heraclas and Di-  
 “onysius, the Bishops thereof, the Presbyters al-  
 “ways named one, chosen from among them, and  
 “placed in an higher degree, Bishop. As if an army  
 “should make an emperor; or the deacons should  
 “choose one of themselves whom they knew to be  
 “most diligent, and call him arch-deacon.” And

a little afterwards, in the same Epistle, he says, " *Presbyter* and *Bishop*, the one is the name of *age*, the other of *dignity* : Whence in the Epistles to " *Timothy* and *Titus*, there is mention made of the " ordination of *Bishop* and *Deacon*, but not of *Pres-* " *byters*, because the *Presbyter* is included in the " *Bishop*."

After perusing this most explicit and unequivocal testimony ; a testimony which one would imagine could scarcely have been more formal or more decisive ; you will be surprised to learn that some Episcopal writers have ventured to say, that *Yerome* merely offers a *conjecture*, that in the Apostles' days, *Bishop* and *Presbyter* were the same. If the extracts above stated be the language of *conjecture*, I should be utterly at a loss to know what is the language of *assertion* and *proof*. In what manner could he have spoken more clearly or more positively ? But I will not insult your understandings by pursuing the refutation of this pretence. From the foregoing extracts, it is abundantly apparent,

1. That the interpretation given, in my second letter, of those passages of Scripture which represent *Bishops* and *Presbyters* as the *same*, in *office* and *power*, as well as in *title*, is by no means a novel interpretation, invented to serve the purposes of a party, as *Episcopalians* have frequently asserted ; but an interpretation more than 1400 years old ; and represented as the general sense of the apostolic age, by one who had as good an opportunity

of becoming acquainted with early opinions on this subject as any man then living.

2. That a departure from the primitive model of church government had taken place in Jerome's day; that this departure consisted in making a distinction of order between *Bishops* and *Presbyters*; and that this distinction was neither warranted by Scripture, nor conformable to the apostolic model; but owed its origin to the decay of religion, and especially to the ambition of ministers. It commenced "when every one began to think that those whom he baptized were rather *his* than *Christ's*."

3. It is expressly asserted by Jerome, that this change in the constitution of the Christian ministry came in (*prokatim*) by little and little. He says, indeed, in one of the passages above quoted, that it was agreed "all over the world," as a remedy against schism, to choose one of the Presbyters, and make him *President* or *Moderator* of the body; and some commentators on this passage have represented it as saying that the change was made *all at once*. Fortunately, however, we have Jerome's express declaration in another place, that the practice came in *gradually*. But whether half a century or two centuries elapsed before the "whole world" came to an agreement on this subject, he does not say.

4. Jerome further informs us, that the first pre-eminence of Bishops was only such as the body of the Presbyters were able to confer. They were only standing *Presidents* or *Moderators*; and all the ordination they received, on being thus chosen,

was performed by the *Presbyters themselves*\*. This he tells us was the only Episcopacy that existed in the church of *Alexandria*, one of the most conspicuous then in the world, until after the middle of the third century.

5. It is finally manifest, from these quotations, that while Jerome maintains the *parity* of all ministers of the Gospel in the primitive church, he entirely excludes *Deacons* from being an order of *clergy* at all. "Who can endure it, that a *minister of tables and of widows* should proudly exalt himself above those at whose prayers the body and blood of Christ is made?"

Some zealous Episcopal writers have endeavored to destroy the force of these express declarations of *Jerome*, by quoting other passages, in which he

\* To this some Episcopal writers reply, that *Jerome* does not expressly assert that the *Presbyters ordained* the Bishop, but only that they *chose* him, placed him in a *higher seat*, and called him Bishop. And hence they take the liberty of inferring that the *election* was by the *Presbyters*, but the *ordination* by other diocesan Bishops. To suppose this, is to make *Jerome* reason most inconclusively, and adduce an instance which was not only nothing to the purpose, but directly hostile to his whole argument. If the *Presbyters* did not do all that was done, the case had nothing to do with his reasoning. Besides, *Eutychius*, the patriarch of *Alexandria*, in his *Origines Ecclesie Alexandrinæ*, published by the learned *Selden*, expressly declares, "that the twelve *Presbyters* constituted by *Mark*, upon the vacancy of the See, did choose out of their number one to be head over the rest, and the other eleven did lay their hands upon him, and blessed him, and made him Patriarch."

speaks of *Bishops* and *Presbyters* in the current language of his time. For instance, in one place, speaking of that pre-eminence which Bishops had then attained, he asks, "What can a *Bishop* do that a *Presbyter* may not also do, excepting ordination?" But it is evident that *Jerome*, in this passage, refers, not to the primitive right of *Bishops*, but to a prerogative which they had gradually acquired, and which was generally yielded to them in his day. His position is, that even then, there was no right which they arrogated to themselves above *Presbyters*, excepting that of ordination. In like manner, in another place, he makes a kind of loose comparison between the officers of the Christian church, and the *Jewish Priesthood*. These passages, however, and others of a similar kind, furnish nothing in support of the *Episcopal cause*\*. *Jerome*, when writing on ordinary occasions, spoke of *Episcopacy* as it then stood. But when he undertook explicitly to deliver an opinion respecting *primitive Episcopacy*, he expressed himself in the words we have seen; words as absolutely decisive as any friend of *Presbyterian* party could wish. To attempt to set vague allusions, and phrases of dubious import, in opposition to such express and unequivocal pass-

\* Accordingly *Bishop Stillingfleet* declares, "Among all the fifteen testimonies produced by a learned writer out of *Jerome*, for the superiority of *Bishops* above *Presbyters*, I cannot find one that does found it upon *Divine right*; but only on the convenience of such an order, for the peace and unity of the Church." *Tritem.*

ges; passages in which the writer professedly and formally lays down a doctrine, reasons at great length in its support, and deliberately deduces his conclusion, is as absurd as it is uncandid. *Ferome*, therefore, notwithstanding all the arts which have been employed to set aside his testimony, remains a firm and decisive witness in support of our principle, that the doctrine of ministerial parity was the doctrine of the primitive church. Accordingly Bishop *Jewel*, Professor *Raignolds*, Bishop *Stillingfleet*, and other learned divines of the church of England, interpret this Father, on the subject of Episcopacy, precisely as I have done, and consider him as expressly declaring that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* were the same in the apostolic age.

*Hilary*, who wrote about the year 376, in his Commentary on *Ephesians* iv. 2. has the following passage. "After that churches were planted in all places, and officers ordained, matters were settled *otherwise than they were in the beginning*. "And hence it is, that the Apostles' writings *do not in all things agree to the present constitution of the church*: because they were written under the first rise of the church; for he calls *Timothy*, who was created a *Presbyter* by him, a *Bishop*, for so at first the *Presbyters* were called; among whom this was the course of governing churches, that as one withdrew another took his place; and in *Egypt*, even at this day, the *Presbyters* ordain in the Bishop's absence. But because the following *Presbyters* began to be found unworthy to hold the first place, the method *was changed*, the

“ Council providing that not order, but merit  
“ should create a Bishop.”

In this passage, we have not only an express declaration that the Christian church, in the days of *Hilary*, had deviated from its primitive pattern; but also that this deviation had a particular respect to the name and office of *Bishop*, which, in the beginning, was the same with *Presbyter*. He also declares, that, notwithstanding this change, *Presbyters*, even then, sometimes ordained; and that the reason of their not continuing to exercise this power was, that many of them being unfit to be trusted with such a power, it was *taken out of their hands*, as a *prudential* measure, by the authority of the church.

The testimony of *Chrysostom*, who wrote about the year 398, is also in our favor. “ The Apostles,” says he, “ having discoursed concerning  
“ the Bishops, and described them, declaring what  
“ they ought to be, and from what they ought to  
“ abstain, omitting the order of *Presbyters*, de-  
“ scends to the *Deacons*; and why so, but because  
“ between Bishop and Presbyter there is scarcely  
“ any difference; and to them is committed both  
“ the *instruction* and the *Presidency* of the church;  
“ and whatever he said of *Bishops* agrees also to  
“ *Presbyters*. In *ordination alone* they have gone  
“ *beyond the Presbyters\**.” In 1 *Epist. ad Tim.*  
“ *Hom. 11.*

\* This perfectly agrees with the representation of *Jerome*, (with whom *Chrysostom* was nearly contemporary) who says,

*Theodoret*, who flourished about the year 480, in his Commentary on 1 *Tim.* iii. makes the following declaration: "The Apostles call a *Presbyter* a *Bishop*, as we showed when we expounded the *Epistle* to the *Philippians*, and which may be also learned from this place, for after the precepts proper to *Bishops*, he describes the things which belong to *Deacons*. But as I said, of old they called the same men both *Bishops* and *Presbyters*."

*Primasius*, who was contemporary with *Theodoret*, and is said to have been *Augustine's* disciple, in explaining 1 *Tim.* iii. asks, "Why the Apostle leaps from the duties of *Bishops* to the duties of *Deacons*, without any mention of *Presbyters*?" and answers, "Because *Bishops* and *Presbyters* are the same degree."

*Sedulius* also, who wrote about the year 470, in his Commentary on *Titus* 1, expressly asserts the identity of Bishop and Presbyter. He declares, not only that the *titles* are interchangeably applied to the same men, but also that *the office is the same*; many of them being found, in the primitive church, in one city, which could not be true of *diocesan Bishops*. In proof of this, he adduces the case of the Elders of *Ephesus*, *Acts* 20, who all dwelt in one city, and who, though called *Elders* or *Presbyters* in the 17th verse of that chapter, are yet, in the 28th verse, called *Bishops*.

that the only right which Bishops had gained over Presbyters, in his day, was that of ordination.



In opposition to the foregoing testimonies, we are told by the friends of prelacy, that *Aerius*, a Presbyter of *Sebastia*, and contemporary with *Jerome*, was reputed an *heretic* for holding that there was no difference between *Bishops* and *Presbyters*. And as an authority on this subject, they refer us to *Epiphanius*, who, towards the close of the fourth century, undertook to give a list of heresies, and included *Aerius* in the number. But when the case of *Aerius* is impartially examined, it will be found to weigh nothing in this controversy. For, in the first place, *Epiphanius* is a writer of no credit. The learned *Mosheim* speaks of him in the following terms. "His book against all the heresies which had sprung up in the church until his time, has little or no reputation; as it is full of inaccuracies and errors, and discovers almost in every page the levity and ignorance of its author." But secondly, by comparing the whole testimony of antiquity on this subject, it appears that *Aerius* was condemned, not so much for maintaining that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* were the same by the word of God, as for insisting that there ought not to be any difference made between them; in asserting which, he opposed that pre-eminence which the Bishops had gradually gained, and set himself against the actual constitution of most of the churches in his day. For this he was hated and reviled by the friends of high-church doctrines, and stigmatized as a *heretic*.

and *schismatic* \*. This appears to have been the true reason why *Aerius* rendered himself so obnoxious, and was condemned by so many; while *Jerome* and *Augustin*, unquestionably the most learned divines of the age, though they held and avowed substantially the same doctrine, yet escaped similar treatment, by tolerating, and even approving the moderate prelacy which was established in their time, not as a *Divine appointment*, but as a system founded on *human prudence*. Accordingly Bishop *Stillingfleet* observes, "I believe, upon the strictest inquiry, *Medina's* judgment will prove true, that *Jerome, Augustin, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Theophylact*, were all of *Aerius* his judgment, as to the identity of both the name and the order of *Bishops and Presbyters* in the primitive church. But here lay the difference: *Aerius* proceeded from hence to separate from Bishops and their churches, because they

\* The following passage from Dr. *Hawkes's* (an Episcopal clergyman) *Ecclesiastical History*, i. p. 340, is worthy of notice. "*Aerius* made a fiercer resistance, and maintained more offensive doctrines; that *Bishops and Presbyters* in the Scripture are the same persons, and only different descriptions of age and office; that prayers for the dead were futile, and hopes from their intercession vain; that stated fasts and festivals had no prescription in the New Testament. These, with similar assertions, roused a host of enemies, and he was quickly silenced. So superstition stalked triumphant, and no man dared open his mouth against any abuses."

“ were Bishops. Whereas *Jerome*, while he held  
 “ the same doctrine, did not think it necessary to  
 “ cause a schism in the church by separating from  
 “ the Bishops, for his opinion is clear, that the first  
 “ institution of them was for preventing schism,  
 “ and therefore for peace and unity he thought  
 “ their institution very useful in the church of  
 “ God.” *Irenicum*. To the judgment of *Stilling-  
 fleet* may be added that of Professor *Rainolds*,  
*Bishop Morton*, and other eminent Episcopal writ-  
 ters; who frankly acknowledge that *Aerius* coin-  
 cided in opinion on this subject with *Jerome*, and  
 other distinguished Fathers, who undeniably taught  
 the same doctrine, without being stigmatized as  
 heretics.

“ Another witness on whose testimony much stress  
 is laid by Episcopalians, is *Eusebius*. They tell us  
 that this historian, who lived early in the *fourth*  
 century, frequently speaks of *Bishops* as superior  
 to common *Presbyters*; that he gives catalogues of  
 the Bishops who presided over several of the most  
 eminent churches; that he mentions their names in  
 the order of succession, from the apostolic age  
 down to his own time; and that all succeeding ec-  
 clesiastical writers speak the same language. But  
 what does all this prove? Nothing more than we  
 have before granted. No one disputes that before  
 the time of *Constantine*, in whose reign *Eusebius*  
 lived, a kind of prelacy prevailed, which was more  
 fully organized and established by that Emperor.  
 But does *Eusebius* inform us what kind of difference

there was between the *Bishops* and *Presbyters* of his day? Does he say that the former were a different *order* from the latter? Does he declare that there was a superiority of order vested in *Bishops* by *Divine appointment*? Does he assert that *Bishops* in the days of the Apostles, and for a century afterwards, were the same *kind of officers* with those who were called by the same title in the fourth century? Does he tell us that this superior order of clergy were the only ecclesiastical officers who were allowed, in his day, to *ordain* and *confirm*? I have never met with a syllable of all this in *Eusebius*. All that can be gathered from him is, that there were persons called *Bishops* in the days of the Apostles; that there had been a succession of *Bishops* in the church from the Apostles to the fourth century, when he lived; and that in *his day*, there was a distinction between *Bishops* and other *Presbyters*. But does any one deny this? We agree that there were *Bishops* in the first century, and have proved from Scripture and the early Fathers, that this title was then applied to the ordinary Pastors of single congregations. We agree, also, that there was a succession of *Bishops* in the second and third centuries. And finally, we agree that in the time of *Constantine*, a moderate kind of prelacy had been established in the church. All this is perfectly consistent with our doctrine, viz. that *diocesan* Episcopacy, or *Bishops*, as an order superior to *Presbyters*, were unknown in the primitive church. I have never heard of a sentence in *Eusebius* that

touches this point; and I need not repeat that it is the grand point in dispute. On the other hand, we have seen that *Jerome*, who lived and wrote a little after *Eusebius*, not only touches this point, but formally discusses it, and unequivocally decides, that the *Bishops of Ephesus, Philippi, and Crete*, in the days of *Paul*, were a very different kind of church officers from those *Bishops* who lived in the fourth century.

But this is not all. When *Eusebius* gives us formal catalogues of *Bishops* in succession, from the Apostles' time until his own, he himself warns us against laying too much stress on his information; frankly confessing, "that he was obliged to rely much on *tradition*, and that he could trace no footsteps of other historians going before him only in a few narratives." Another confession of the same writer, no less pertinent, I shall present in the words of the great *Milton*. "*Eusebius*, the ancientest writer of church history extant, confesses in the 4th chapter of his 3d Book, that it was no easy matter to tell who were those that were left *Bishops* of the churches by the Apostles, more than what a man might gather from the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Epistles of St. Paul*, in which number he reckons *Timothy* for *Bishop of Ephesus*. So as may plainly appear, that this tradition of *Bishopping Timothy* over *Ephesus*, was but taken for granted out of that place in *St. Paul*, which was only an entreating

" him to carry at *Ephesus*, to do something left  
 " him in charge. Now if *Eusebius*, a famous writ-  
 " ter, thought it so difficult to tell who were ap-  
 " pointed Bishops by the Apostles, much more  
 " may we think it difficult to *Leonidas*, an obscure  
 " Bishop, speaking beyond his own diocese; and  
 " certainly much more hard was it for either of  
 " them to determine what *kind* of Bishops these  
 " were, if they had so little means to know *who*  
 " they were; and much less reason have we to  
 " stand to their definitive sentence, seeing they  
 " have been so rash as to raise up such lofty Bish-  
 " ops and Bishopricks, out of places of Scripture  
 " merely misunderstood. Thus while we leave  
 " the Bible to gad after these traditions of the an-  
 " cients, we hear the ancients themselves confess-  
 " ing, that what knowledge they had in this point  
 " was such as they had gathered from the Bible."  
*Milton against Prelatical Episcopacy, p. 3:*

Besides the quotations above presented, which abundantly prove that the primitive *Bishop* was the pastor of a single congregation, there are some facts, incidentally stated; by early writers, which serve remarkably to confirm the same truth.

The *first* fact is, the *great number* of Bishops which ecclesiastical historians inform us, were found in early periods of the church, within small districts of country. *Eusebius* tells us, that about the year 260, when *Gallienus* was emperor, *Paul*, Bishop of *Antioch*, began to oppose the doctrine of

the Divinity of Christ. A Council was intricately called at Antioch, to consider and judge of Paul's heresy. Dionysius, Bishop of the church of Alexandria, being invited, came to this Council; and the historian, after mentioning six conspicuous names, adds, "It would be no less difficult to enumerate six hundred other Bishops; who all flowed together to that place." At a conference which Augustin, and the Bishops of his Province, in Africa, had with the Donatists, about the year 410, there were present between five and six hundred Bishops. Dalmatius, the Bishop of Gyzicon, who assisted at the general Council of Ephesus, against the Nestorians, told the Emperor that there were six thousand Bishops in that Council who opposed Nestorius. Victor Uticensis, in his work *De Persecutione Vandalica*, informs us, that from the part of Africa in which this persecution took place, six hundred and sixty Bishops fled; besides the great number that were murdered and imprisoned, and many more who were tolerated. And, to mention but one more instance, we are told by Archbishop Usher, and other ecclesiastical historians, that Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland, who went thither about the year 432, founded in that island 365 churches, ordained over them the same number of Bishops, and also ordained for those churches 3000 Elders. No one who is acquainted with

"This single fact, so well authenticated, of Patrick's organising churches, and ordaining Bishops and Elders to them

the state of the church in those early times, and especially with the difficulty and infrequency of *long journies*, at that period, will believe, that these *Bishops* were any other than the *pastors* of single congregations. To suppose that they were *diocesans*, in the modern sense of the word, would be an absurdity. In the State of *New-York* there is but one Episcopal Bishop, and over all the ten thousand parish churches in England, there are only twenty-seven of this order. In proportion as the church, among other corruptions, receded from the scriptural doctrine of ministerial parity, in the same proportion those who were called Bishops became less and less numerous; insomuch, that at the great Council of *Trent* there were only about *forty* Bishops convened.

A *second* fact, which goes far towards proving that *Bishops*, in early times, were the ordinary *pastors* of single congregations, is that it was then customary for the *flock* of which the Bishop was to have the charge, to *meet together* for the purpose of *electing* him; and he was always ordained in

*land*, is little short of demonstration, that primitive Episcopacy was *parochial* and not *diocesan*. Here was a *Bishop* and a little more than *eight Elders*, on an average, to each congregation. He who will take the trouble to compare the number of Bishops in *Ireland* in *Patrick's* time, when perhaps not more than a tenth part of the population was Christian, with the number of those who bear the same denomination in that country at present, will, without hesitation, say, that primitive Episcopacy and modern Episcopacy, are essentially different.



their presence. *Cyprian*, in a passage quoted in a preceding page, expressly tells us, that these were standing rules, in choosing and ordaining Bishops; and *Eusebius*, (*lib. 6. cap. 28, p. 229*) in giving an account of the election of *Fabianus* to the office of Bishop, in *Rome*, confirms the statement of *Cyprian*. He tells us, that upon the death of Bishop *Anterus*, "All the people met together in the church to choose a successor, proposing several illustrious and eminent personages as fit for that office, whilst no one so much as thought upon *Fabianus*, then present, till a dove miraculously came and sat upon his head, in the same manner as the Holy Ghost formerly descended on our Saviour; and then all the people, guided as it were with one Divine spirit, cried out with one mind and soul, that *Fabianus* was worthy of the Bishoprick: and so straightway taking him, they placed him on the Episcopal throne." The very existence of these rules in early times shows that Bishops were then nothing more than the pastors of single churches; for in no other case is the application of such rules possible. And accordingly afterwards, when diocesan Episcopacy crept into the church, this mode of choosing and ordaining Bishops became impracticable, and was gradually laid aside.

A third fact, which shows that primitive Episcopacy was *parochial* and not *diocesan*, is, that for a considerable time after the days of the Apostles, all the *Elders* who were connected with a *Bish-*

op, are represented as *belonging to the same congregation with him, and sitting with him* when the congregation was convened for public worship. Indeed, some of the early writers go so far as to inform us in what manner they were seated, viz. that the *Bishop* sat in the middle of a semi-circular bench; that the *Elders* took their places on the same bench, on each side of their President or Moderator; and that the *Deacons* remained in a standing posture in the front of this seat, and in a lower place, ready to perform the services required of them. This representation perfectly accords with our doctrine of primitive Episcopacy, in which every congregation was furnished with a Bishop, Elders, and Deacons; but cannot possibly be reconciled with the diocesan form.

A *fourth* fact, which shows that the primitive Bishop was only the pastor of a single congregation, is, that the early writers represent the Bishop as *living in the same house with his Presbyters or Elders*; a house near the place of worship to which they resorted, and capable of accommodating them all. They tell us, also, that the Bishop, together with his Elders, were supported by the same oblations; that these oblations were offered on *one altar*, or communion table; and that they were constantly divided, agreeably to certain established rules between the Bishop and Elders. It must be obvious to every impartial reader, that this account agrees only with the system of parochial Episcopacy, and that on any other principle such a plan

of procedure would be at once impracticable and absurd.

"The *last* circumstance relating to the primitive Bishop, which serves to fix his character, as the pastor of a single congregation, is *the nature of that service which he was accustomed to perform*. We have seen something of this in the foregoing quotations; but it will be proper to bring together into one view the duties incumbent on the Bishop, in the apostolic and immediately succeeding ages. The early writers, then, speak of the primitive Bishop as performing, in general, all the Baptisms in his flock; as the only person who, in ordinary cases, administered the Lord's Supper, as constantly present with his people when convened; as the leader of their worship; as their stated public instructor; as visiting all the sick under his care; as catechising the young people several times in each week; as having the superintendency of the poor, none of whom were to be relieved by the Deacons without, in each particular case, consulting the Bishop; as celebrating all marriages; as attending all funerals; as under obligations to be personally acquainted with every individual of his flock, not overlooking even the servant-men and maids; as employed in healing differences among neighbors; and besides all these, attending to the discipline of his society, receiving and excluding members, &c. &c. Now is it not evident that no man could perform these duties for more than a single congregation? Can any impartial reader be-

lieve that the officers to whom all these details of parochial labors were allotted, were any other than the pastors of particular churches? To suppose that they were diocesan Bishops, having a number of congregations, with subordinate pastors, under their control, is a supposition too absurd to be for a moment admitted.

I have repeatedly had occasion, in the preceding sheets, to observe, that when some of the Fathers speak of *Elders* or *Presbyters* as distinguished from *Bishops*, it proves nothing in favor of the Episcopal cause, because we know there were *Ruling Elders* in the primitive church; and it is, to say the least, highly probable that when this distinction is made, the writers generally mean to include in the Presbytery those who *ruled* only, as well as those who both *ruled* and *taught*. That there were such officers in the apostolic age, we have before adduced proof which is pronounced satisfactory by some of the ablest Episcopal writers. But we have further evidence that this class of church officers was not discontinued in the church till after the third century. In the year 103, in the *Gesta Purgationis Cæciliani et Felicis*, we meet with the following enumeration of church officers, *Presbyteri, Diacones et Seniores*, i. e. "The Presbyters, the Deacons and Elders." And a little after, it is added—" *Adhibite conclericos et seniores plebis, ecclesiasticos viros, et inquirent diligenter quæ sint ista dissensiones*, i. e. "add the fellow-clergyman, and

“Elders of the people, ecclesiastical men, and let them inquire diligently what are these dissensions.” In that assembly, likewise, several letters were produced and read; one addressed *Clero et Senioribus*. i. e. “to the Clergyman and the Elders;” and another, *Clericis et Senioribus*. i. e. “to the Clergymen and the Elders.” In confirmation of this fact, we may likewise cite *Origen*, who, in the third book of his “Treatise against *Celsus*,” has these expressions: “There are some rulers appointed, who may inquire concerning the conversation and manners of those that are admitted, that they may debar from the congregation such as commit filthiness.” *Cyprian* also, a great authority with Episcopalians, *lib. iv. epist. 39*, writing to his *Presbyters* and *Elders*, and *people\**, respecting a certain person, called *Numidicus*, enjoins that he should be reckoned with the *Presbyters* of that church, and should sit with the *clergy*, to make up their *Presbytery*; and yet it appears that it was only as a *ruling* and not as a *teaching* *Presbyter*, that he was to be received by them; for *Cyprian* subjoins, *Et promovebitur quidem, cum Deus permiserit, ad ampliorem locum religionis sue, quando in presentiam protegente Domino venerimus*. i. e. “He shall be promoted, if it be the will of God, to a more distinguished place of his religion (or of his religious function) when, through the divine pro-

\* *Cyprian* was, at this time, in a state of exile from his congregation.

“tection, we shall return.” If this *Numidicus* were already a *teaching Presbyter*, how could he be *promoted*? *Cyprian* could not have meant to promise that he should be made a *diocesan Bishop*; for that, on the principles of Episcopalians themselves, was an honor which he had no right to dispose of. He could not mean that this man should be the Pastor or Bishop of the single congregation of which he himself had the pastoral charge; for this promotion was to take place when he returned to his people, and of course, when they would not stand in need of another Pastor. The only probable inference, then, is, that *Numidicus* was authorized to take a place in the Presbytery of that church, as a *ruling Elder*, with the promise, that on the return of the Pastor, he should be promoted to the office of *teaching Elder*, and empowered to administer the word and ordinances.

*Hilary* clearly describes the office of *ruling Elder* in the church. In his explication of 1 *Tim.* v. 1. he has the following passage. “Wherefore both the *Synagogue*, and afterwards the *Church*, had *Elders*, without whose counsel nothing was done in the church; which order, by what negligence it *grew into disuse*, I know not, unless, perhaps, by the *sloth*, or rather by the *pride* of the *Teachers*, while they alone wished to appear something.” Here is an express reference to the idea stated in a former letter, that the Christian church was modelled after the *Synagogue*. Here is also an explicit declaration, that

in the primitive church, there was a class of *Presbyters* which had too much *fallen into disuse*, at the time when Hilary wrote; but this cannot apply to *teaching Presbyters*, for we know, from the unanimous voice of history, and from the acknowledgment of all parties in this dispute, that *they* were in no degree discontinued at any period. And finally, here is a further declaration that they were discontinued from very improper motives; chiefly, as the writer supposes, because the *teaching Elders* were unwilling to having persons sitting with them on the same bench, and having an equal vote and power, as to *government*, with themselves, while they were confessedly inferior with respect to the function of *teaching*. But though this office had fallen into *disuse* in some churches, and probably in most of them, when Hilary wrote, yet it was not wholly discontinued; for Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, often refers to these Elders in his writings. Thus *Con. Crescon. lib. iii. cap. 56.* he speaks of *Peregrinus, Presbyter et Seniores Musticanae regionis*, i. e. "Peregrine, the Presbyter, and the Elders of the Mustacan district." And again, he addresses one of his Epistles to his church at Hippo; *Epist. 139, Dilectissimis fratribus, Clero, Senioribus et universae plebi ecclesiae Hipponensis.* i. e. "To the beloved brethren, the Clergyman, the Elders, and all the people of the church at Hippo."

We have complete evidence, then, from the Fathers, as well as from Scripture, that the office of *ruling Elder* existed in the primitive church; and

we have a direct assertion from a Father of undoubted authority, that this class of officers had been *generally* discontinued before the middle of the fourth century. Presbyterians, in retaining this office, adhere to the apostolic model; while Episcopalians, in rejecting it, depart from that model, and lay themselves under the necessity of erecting offices in their church, for which they do not pretend to produce a scriptural warrant\*.

Such is the testimony of the later Fathers on the subject before us. We can find much evidence that, after the close of the *third century*, a difference of rank between *Bishops* and ordinary *Presbyters* began to be generally acknowledged; but we

\* No church can long proceed in a regular and orderly manner, without appointing some of its more grave and distinguished *lay-members* to assist the minister in performing ecclesiastical duties. *Episcopalians* have their *Vestry*, and *Independents* their *Committee*; both of whom, among other things, discharge many of the duties which properly belong to *ruling Elders*. And yet both *Independents* and *Episcopalians* concur in rejecting this class of officers; and thus virtually fix on themselves the charge of having offices for which no scriptural warrant can be produced. How numerous are the difficulties and absurdities to which men reduce themselves, when they depart from primitive order! And how strongly does the aspect of every other religious communion testify, that Presbyterian church government is the only *convenient* and *adequate* form; inasmuch as none of them can proceed a step without adopting, in *practice*, her radical principles!



can find no evidence whatever, within the first four centuries\*, that the Christian church considered diocesan Episcopacy as the *apostolic* and *primitive* form. On the contrary, we have found several Fathers of high reputation expressly declaring, that in the primitive church Bishop and Presbyter were the same; and that prelacy, as it existed in the fourth and following centuries, was a *human invention*, and *gradually* adopted in the church, as a measure of *prudence*. We have found, in particular, our Father, who stands at the pinnacle of honor, for learning as well as piety, maintaining both these positions with a clearness, a force of argument, and a detail of illustration, which one would imagine might satisfy incredulity itself. And we have seen in these early writers, a variety of facts *incidentally* stated; facts which, taken *alone*, would be considered by any court on earth as affording conclusive proof, that even after a moderate kind of prelacy arose, the Bishops were still the Pastors of single congregations.

I will not exhaust your patience, my brethren, by pursuing further a chain of testimony so clear and indisputable. I have intentionally disguised nothing that seemed to favor the Episcopal cause; and, indeed, amidst such poverty of even plausible evidence in their behalf, there is little temptation to disguise any thing. It has truly filled me with

\* I believe that this position might be extended several centuries further; but I forbear at present to urge it beyond the first four hundred years.

surprise at every step of my progress, to observe, that, with all the confidence of assertion, and all the parade of testimony, exhibited by the friends of prelacy, they should be able to produce so little from the Fathers, their strong hold, which can yield them even the semblance of support. I cannot, therefore, conclude this letter in words more expressive of my fixed opinion, than those of a distinguished Bishop of the church of *England*, who, though he regarded prelacy as a wise *human* institution, steadfastly resisted the claim of *Divine right*, which some high churchmen in his day were disposed to urge. After having stated some of their most plausible arguments, he declares, "I hope my reader will now see what weak proofs are brought for this distinction and superiority of order. No Scripture; no primitive general Council; no general consent of primitive Doctors and Fathers; no, not *one* primitive Father of note, speaking particularly and home to their purpose\*."

\* Bishop Croft's *Naked Truth*, p. 47.

LETTER VI.

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*Testimony of the Reformers, and other Witnesses for  
the Truth, in different ages and nations.*

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS,

YOU have been already reminded, that neither the question before us, nor any other which relates to the faith or the order of the church, is to be decided by *human* authority. We have a higher and more unerring standard. But still, when there is a remarkable concurrence of opinion among learned and holy men, in favor of any doctrine or practice, it affords a strong presumptive argument that such doctrine or practice is conformable to Scripture. Thus the fact, that the great body of the Reformers concurred in embracing and supporting that system of evangelical truth, which has been since very improperly styled *Calvinism\**, is justly viewed by the friends of that system as a powerful argument in its favor. Let us apply this principle to the case under consideration.

\* I say *improperly* styled *Calvinism*, because, to say nothing of its much greater antiquity, the same system had been distinctly taught by several eminent Reformers, and among others, by *Luther* himself, long before *Calvin* appeared.

It has been common for the zealous friends of prelacy to insinuate, that the Presbyterian doctrine of parity was unknown till the time of *Calvin*; that he was the first distinguished and successful advocate for this doctrine; and that the great body of the Reformers totally differed from him on this subject, and embraced Episcopacy. How persons even tolerably versed in the history of the Reformed churches, could ever allow themselves to make such a representation, I am altogether at a loss to conceive. Nothing certainly can be more remote from fact. The smallest attention to the subject will convince every impartial inquirer, that the most distinguished witnesses for Evangelical truth, through the dark ages, long before *Calvin* lived, maintained the doctrine of ministerial parity; that the earliest Reformers, both in Great Britain and on the continent of Europe, admitted the same principle; that all the Reformed churches, excepting that of *England*, were organized on this principle; that the church of *England* stands alone in the whole Protestant world, in making diocesan Bishops an order of clergy, superior to Presbyters; and that even those venerable men who finally settled her government and worship, did not consider this superiority as resting on the ground of *Divine appointment*, but of *ecclesiastical usage* and *human expediency*.

If I mistake not, it will be easy to satisfy you, by a very brief induction of facts, that these assertions are not lightly made.

In the honorable catalogue of Witnesses for the truth, amidst the corruption and darkness of Papal error, the *Waldenses* hold the first place. They began to appear about the close of the seventh century, when they resided chiefly in the vallies of *Piedmont*. But they afterwards greatly multiplied, spread themselves extensively in *France*, *Switzerland*, and *Italy*, and under different names in different districts, continued their testimony in favor of Evangelical truth, for a number of centuries. All Protestant historians concur in representing them as constituting the purest part of the Christian church for several ages: and *Reinerius*, who had once lived among them, and who was their bitter persecutor, says, "They are more pernicious to the church of *Rome* than any other sect of heretics, for three reasons: 1. Because they are *older* than any other sect; for some say that they have been ever since the time of *Syvester*; and others say, from the time of the Apostles. 2. Because they are more *extensively spread* than any other sect; there being scarcely a country into which they have not crept. 3. Because other sects are abominable to God for their blasphemies; but the *Waldenses* are more *pious* than any other heretics; they believe truly of God, live justly before men, and receive all the articles of the creed; only they hate the church of *Rome*."

Among the numerous points in which these witnesses for the truth rejected the errors of the Romish church, and contended for the doctrine of Scripture, and the apostolic age, one was that there

ought to be *no diversity of rank* among ministers of the Gospel; that Bishops and Presbyters, according to the word of God, and primitive practice, were the same order. Nor did they merely embrace this doctrine in theory. Their ecclesiastical organization was Presbyterian in its form. I know that this fact concerning the *Waldenses* has been denied; but it is established beyond all reasonable question by authentic historians. *Perrin, Aneas Sylvius\**, *Thuanus, Walsingham*, and others, who considered the tenet as a most offensive one, expressly assert, that they held it. And although at some periods of their history they had persons among them whom they denominated *Bishops*; yet it is well known that they were mere *Presbyters*, who received no new consecration as Bishops; and that they laid claim to no superiority of order or power.

The noble stand in defence of Evangelical truth, made by the celebrated Dr. *John Wickliffe* †, is well known. This illustrious English divine was Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, and has been frequently called "the morning Star of the Reformation." He protested with great

\* *Aneas Sylvius* declares, "They deny the Hierarchy, maintaining that there is no difference among the priests by reason of dignity of office." Quotations equally decisive might be produced from other authentic writers.

† "*Wickliffe*," says Bishop *Newcome*, "was not only a good divine and scripturist, but well skilled in the civil, canon, and English law. To great learning and abilities, he added the ornament of a grave, unblemished, and pious conduct."

boldness and zeal against the superstitions of the church of *Rome*, and taught a system, both of doctrine and order, remarkably similar to that which *Luther*, *Calvin*, and the great body of the Reformers, two hundred years afterwards, united in recommending to the Christian world\*. "He was for rejecting all mere human rites, and new shadows or traditions in religion; and with regard to the identity of the order of *Bishops* and *Priests* in the apostolic age, he is very positive: *Unum audacter assero*," &c. "One thing I boldly assert, that in the primitive church, or in the time of the Apostle *Paul*, two orders of clergy were thought sufficient, viz. *Priest* and *Deacon*; and I do also say, that in the time of *Paul*, *sunt idem Presbyter atque Episcopus*, i. e. a *Priest* and a *Bishop* were one and the same; for in those times the distinct orders of *Pope*, *Cardinals*, *Patriarchs*, *Archbishops*, *Bishops*, *Archdeacons*, *Officials*, and *Deans*, were not invented†." The followers of *Wickliffe* imbibed this as well as the

\* He renounced the supremacy of the *Pope*; rejected the heresy of *transubstantiation*; and taught, that the *Bible* is a perfect rule of life and manners, and ought to be read by the people; that human *traditions* are superfluous and sinful; that we must practise and teach only the laws of *Christ*; that mystical and significant *ceremonies* in religious worship are unlawful; and that to restrain men to a *prescribed form of prayer*, is contrary to the liberty granted them by God.

† See *Lewis's Life of Wickliffe*, 8vo. 1720.

other opinions of their master; and accordingly, it is well known that they held and practised ordination by *Presbyters*, not for want of diocesan Bishops, but on the avowed principle, that they considered all ministers who "labored in the word and doctrine," and administered sacraments, as having equal power\*.

The renowned martyrs, *John Huss* and *Jerome*, of Prague†, who laid down their lives for the truth, a little after the time of *Wickliffe*, embraced the greater part, if not all the opinions of the English Reformer, and especially his doctrine concerning the *parity* of christian ministers. Their disciples acted in conformity with this doctrine. *Æneas Sylvius*, (afterwards *Pius II.*) speaking of the *Hussites*, says, "One of the dogmas of this *pestiferous sect*, is, that there is no difference of order among those who bear the priestly office." This account is confirmed by the historian *Thuanus*, who expressly speaks of their opinions as resembling those of the *English Dissenters*.

The churches which ecclesiastical historians have

\* See *Walsingham's Hist. Brevis* A. D. 1389, 339—346.

† *Huss* and *Jerome* were celebrated for their learning as well as piety, and were both distinguished members of the University of *Prague*. The former was more particularly eminent on account of his erudition and eloquence, and performed at the same time the functions of Professor of Divinity in the University, and Pastor of the church in that city. *Mosheim*.



generally distinguished by the title of *The Bohemian Brethren*, and which flourished before the time of *Luther*, are considered as the descendants of the *Hussites*, and as having inherited their opinions as well as their evangelical spirit. These churches distinctly held and taught, as their Book of Discipline proves, that there is but one order of ministers of Divine right, and, of course, that all difference of grades in the ministry, is a matter of *human prudence*. They had, indeed, among them persons who were styled *Bishops*; but they expressly disavowed the Divine institution of this order; and what is more, they derived their ministerial succession from the *Waldenses*, who had no other, strictly speaking; than *Presbyterian Bishops*. Even *Comenius*, their celebrated historian, who says most about their Bishops, distinctly acknowledges that Bishop and Presbyter are *the same* by Divine right. It is also an undoubted and remarkable fact, that the *Bohemian Brethren* retained the office of *Ruling Elder* in their churches; an office which, toward the latter part of the *fourth* century, had been, in the greater part of the Christian world, discontinued. The following representation by the learned *Bucer*, will be deemed, by those who are acquainted with his character, conclusive as to this fact. “The *Bohemian Brethren*, who almost alone  
“ preserved in the world the *purity of the doctrine*,  
“ and the *vigor of the discipline* of Christ, observed  
“ an excellent rule, for which we are compelled to  
“ give them credit, and especially to praise that

" God who thus wrought by them; notwithstanding  
 " ing those Brethren are preposterously despised  
 " by some learned men. The rule which they ob-  
 " served was this: Besides ministers of the word  
 " and sacraments, they had, in each church, a  
 " bench or college of men excelling in gravity and  
 " prudence, who performed the duties of admo-  
 " nishing and correcting offenders, composing dif-  
 " ferences, and judicially deciding in cases of dis-  
 " pute. Of this kind of Elders, *Hilary* wrote,  
 " when he said, *Unde et Synagoga,*" &c. *Script. Ad-*  
*vers. Latom. p. 77.*

The celebrated Mr. *Tindal*, a canon of Oxford,  
 who gave the first translation of the Bible into En-  
 glish; and who suffered martyrdom in the reign of  
*Henry VIII.* for his zeal and his distinguished la-  
 bors in the cause of truth, has the following ex-  
 plicit declaration, in his *Præface of Popish Prelates*.  
 " The Apostles following and obeying the rule,  
 " doctrine, and commandment of our Saviour, or-  
 " dained in his kingdom and congregation, two  
 " officers, one called after the Greek word, *Bishop*,  
 " in English, an *Overseer*; which name was called  
 " *Priest*, after the Greek. Another officer they  
 " chose, and called him *Deacon*, after the Greek;  
 " a minister, in English, to minister alms to the  
 " poor. All that were called *Elders* (or *Priests*, if  
 " they so will) were called *Bishops* also, though  
 " they have now divided the names."

The famous *John Lambert*, another martyr in  
 the same reign, who is represented even by Epis-

capal historians, as a man of great learning, as well as meekness and piety, expressed himself on the subject under consideration in the following manner: "As touching Priesthood in the primitive church, when virtue bare the most room, there were no more officers in the church than *Bishops and Deacons*, as witnesseth, besides Scripture, full apertly *Jerome*, in his commentary upon *St. Paul's Epistles*, where he saith, that those we call *priests*, were all one, and no other but *Bishops*, and the *Bishops* none but *priests*."

The Fathers of the Reformation in *England* were Presbyterians in principle; that is, a majority of the most pious and learned among them considered Bishop and Presbyter as *the same*, by divine right. But as the influence of the Crown was exerted in favor of prelacy; as many of the Bishops were opposed to the Reformation altogether; and as the right of the civil Magistrate to direct the outward organization of the church at pleasure, was acknowledged by all the Reformers, they yielded to the establishment of diocesan Episcopacy, as the most suitable form of government in the circumstances then existing. But it does not appear that any one of them thought of placing Episcopacy on the footing of Divine right, and far less of representing it as of such indispensable and unalterable necessity, as many of their less learned sons have thought proper to maintain since that time. I know that this fact, concerning those venerable Reformers, has been denied. But I know,

Dr. *Redmayn* and Dr. *Cox*, delivered a similar opinion, in still stronger terms; and several of them adduced *Jerome* as a decided authority in support of their opinion. An attempt has been made to place this transaction a number of years farther back than it really stood, in order to show that it was at a period when the views of the Reformers, with respect to the order of the church, were crude and immature. But if Bishop *Stillingfleet* and Bishop *Burnet* are to be believed, such were the language and the views of *Cranmer* and other Prelates, in the reign of *Edward VI.* and a very short time before the forms of ordination and other public service in the church of England were published; in compiling which, it is acknowledged, on all hands, that the Archbishop had a principal share; and which were given to the public in the third year of the reign of that Prince.

Another circumstance, which serves to show that Archbishop *Cranmer* considered the Episcopal system in which he shared, as founded rather in human *prudence* and the will of the *magistrate*, than the *word of God*, is, that he viewed the exercise of all Episcopal jurisdiction as depending on the pleasure of the king; and that as he gave it, so he might take it away at pleasure. Agreeably to this; when *Henry VIII.* died, the worthy Primate regarded his own Episcopal power as expiring with him; and therefore would not act as Archbishop till he had received a new commission from king *Edward*.

Accordingly, when these great Reformers went farther than to compile temporary and fugitive ma-

nists; when they undertook to frame the fundamental and permanent Articles of their Church, we find them carefully guarding against any exclusive claim in behalf of diocesan Episcopacy. If they had deemed an order of Bishops superior to Presbyters, indispensably necessary to the regular organization of the church, and the validity of Christian ordinances, can we suppose that men who showed themselves so faithful and zealous in the cause of Christ, would have been wholly silent on the subject? And, above all, if they entertained such an opinion, would they have forbore to express it in that article in which they undertook formally to state the doctrine of their church with respect to the Christian ministry? That article (the 23d) is couched in the following terms. "It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men, who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." Here is not a syllable said of diocesan Bishops, or of the necessity of Episcopal ordination; on the contrary, there is most evidently displayed a studious care to employ such language as would embrace the other Reformed Churches, and recognize as valid their ministry and ordinances.

And that such was really the design of those

who drew up the Articles of the church of England, is expressly asserted by Bishop Burnet, who will be pronounced by all a competent judge, both of the import and history of these articles. This article, he observes, "is put in very general words, far from that *magisterial stiffness* in which some have taken upon them to dictate in this matter. They who drew it up, had the state of the several churches before their eyes, that had been differently reformed; and although their own had been less forced to go out of the beaten path than any other, yet they knew that all things among themselves had not gone according to those rules, that ought to be sacred in regular times." And, in a subsequent passage, he explicitly declares, that neither the Reformers of the church of England, nor their successors, for nearly eighty years after the articles were published, did ever call in question the validity of the ordination practised in the foreign Reformed churches, by Presbyters alone. And again, he declares—

"Whatever some *hotter spirits* have thought of this, since that time, yet we are very sure, that not only those who penned the articles, but the body of this church, far above half an age after, did, notwithstanding these irregularities, acknowledge the foreign churches, so constituted, to be true churches, as to all the essentials of a church."

Those who wish to persuade us, that the venerable Reformers of the church of England, held the Divine right of diocesan Episcopacy, refer us to the *Ordination Service* drawn up by them, the An-

guage of which, it is contended, cannot be interpreted, and far less justified on any other principle. But those who insist on this argument, forget that the Ordination Service, as it *now stands*, differs considerably from that which was drawn up by *Cranmer* and his associates. If I mistake not, that Service, as it came from the hands of the Reformers, did not contain a sentence inconsistent with the opinions which I have ascribed to them. Above an hundred years afterwards, in the reign of *Charles II.* this Service was revised and altered; and it is remarkable, that the greater part of the alterations were such as indicate a decided intention in their authors to make the whole speak a language more favorable to the *Divine* appointment of Episcopacy than formerly. In the opinion of good judges, the Ordination Service of the church of *England* does not, even *now*, assert the *Divine* institution of prelacy; but as left by the Reformers, it certainly contained no such doctrine.

In conformity with this principle, an act of Parliament was passed; in the 13th year of the reign of *Queen Elizabeth*, to reform certain Disorders touching ministers of the church. This act, as *Dr. Strype*, an Episcopal historian, informs us, was framed with an express view to admitting into the church of *England*, those who had received Presbyterian ordination in the foreign reformed churches, on their subscribing the articles of *faith*. But can we suppose that both houses of Parliament, one of them including the bench of *Bishops*, would have consent-

ed to pass such an act, unless the principle of it had been approved by the most influential Divines of that church?

Nor was this all. The *conduct* of the English Reformers corresponded with their laws and public standards. They invited several eminent Divines from the foreign Reformed churches, who had received no other than Presbyterian ordination, to come over to England; and on their arrival, in consequence of this formal invitation, actually bestowed upon them important benefices in the Church and in the Universities. A more decisive testimony could scarcely be given, that those great and venerable Divines had no scruple respecting the validity of ordination by Presbyters. Had they held the opinion of some modern Episcopals, and at the same time acted thus, they would have been chargeable with high treason against the Redeemer's kingdom, and have merited the reprobation of all honest men.

But further; besides inviting these distinguished Divines into *England*, and giving them a place in the bosom of their church, without requiring them to be re-ordained, Archbishop *Cranmer* and *Grindal*, and their associates, corresponded with *Calvin*; solicited his opinion respecting many points in the reformation of the church; and not only acknowledged him in the most explicit manner, to be a regular minister of Christ, and the church of *Geneva*, to be a sister church; but also addressed him in terms of the most exalted reverence, and hope



ed upon him every epithet of honor. Could they have done all this, if they had considered him as subverting the very foundation of the church, by setting aside prelacy? When I look at the language of the first British Reformers towards this venerable servant of Christ; when I hear them, not only celebrating his learning and his piety in the strongest terms, but also acknowledging in terms equally strong, his noble services in the cause of evangelical truth, and of the Reformation; and when I find the greatest divines that England ever bred, for near a century afterwards, adopting and repeating the same language, I am tempted to ask—are some modern calumniators of *Calvin* really ignorant of what these great Divines of their own church have thought and said respecting him; or have they apostatised as much from the principles of their own Reformers, as they differ from *Calvin*?

Another testimony as to the light in which ordination by Presbyters was viewed by the most distinguished Reformers of the Church of England, is found in a license granted by Archbishop *Grindal*, to the Rev. *John Morison*, a Presbyterian minister, dated April 6, 1582—“ Since you, the said *John Morison*, were admitted and ordained to sacred orders, and the holy ministry, by the imposition of hands, according to the *laudable form and rite of the Reformed church of Scotland*. We, therefore, as much as lies in us, and as by right we may, approving and ratifying the form of your ordination and preferment, done in such

“ *manner aforesaid*, grant unto you a license and  
 “ faculty, that in such orders, by you taken, you  
 “ may, and have power, in any convenient places,  
 “ in and throughout the whole province of *Canter-*  
 “ *bury*, to celebrate divine offices, and to minister  
 “ the sacraments,” &c. Here is not only an expli-  
 cit acknowledgment that ordination by *Presbyters*  
 is *valid*, but an eulogium on it as *laudable*, and this  
 not by an obscure character, but by the Primate of  
 the church of England.

An acknowledgment, still more solemn and de-  
 cisive, is made in one of the *Canons* of the church  
 of *England*, in which all her clergy are command-  
 ed to “ pray for the churches of *England*, *Scotland*,  
 “ and *Ireland*, as parts of Christ’s holy Catholic  
 “ church, which is dispersed throughout the world.”  
 This canon (the 55) among others, was enacted in  
 1604, when the church of *Scotland* was, as it now  
 is, *Presbyterian*; and although the persons who  
 were chiefly instrumental in forming and adopt-  
 ing these canons, had high Episcopal notions;  
 yet the idea that those churches which were not  
 Episcopal in their form, were not to be considered  
 as true churches of Christ, seems at this time to  
 have been entertained by no person of any influence  
 in the church of England. This extravagance was  
 reserved for after times, and the invention of it  
 for persons of a very different spirit from that of  
 the *Grammers*, the *Grindals*, and the *Abbots* of the  
 preceding age.

Dr. *Warner*, a learned Episcopal historian, de-

clares, that "Archbishop *Bancroft* was the first man " in the church of *England* who preached up the " *divine right* of Episcopacy." The same is asserted by many other Episcopal writers ; and this passage from *Warner* is quoted with approbation by Bishop *White* of *Pennsylvania*, in his *Case of the Episcopal Churches*, in showing that the doctrine which founds Episcopacy on *divine right*, has never been embraced by the great body of the most esteemed divines in the church of *England*.

Another fact which corroborates the foregoing statement is, that Dr. *Laud*, afterwards Archbishop, in a public disputation before the University of *Oxford*, venturing to assert the superiority of Bishops, by divine right, was publicly checked by Dr. *Holland*, professor of divinity in that university, who told him that " he was a schismatic, and " went about to make a division between the English and other Reformed churches."

The Reformation in *Scotland* commenced in the year 1560. The constitution of that Church was formed, as every one knows, on the *Presbyterian* plan. This form was retained until the year 1610, when prelacy was violently introduced, against the sense of the nation. In that year *Spotiswood*, *Lamb*, and *Hamilton*, were consecrated Bishops in *London*, by some of the English prelates ; and on their return home, imparted the Episcopal dignity to a number of others. As they had been *Presbyters* before this time, Archbishop *Bancroft* proceeded to their consecration as Bishops, without requiring

them to be previously re-ordained as priests, expressly delivering it as his opinion, that their former Presbyterian ordination was *valid*. The church of *Scotland* remained Episcopal until the year 1639, when Prelacy was abolished, and the Bishops deposed. On this occasion three of these prelates renounced their Episcopal orders, were received by the Presbyterian clergy as plain Presbyters, and officiated as such while they lived. The rest were either excommunicated from the church, or deprived of their ministerial functions. In the year 1661, Episcopacy was again introduced into *Scotland*, and remained the established religion of the country until the Revolution of 1688, when it was again set aside, and Presbyterianism restored, which remains to the present day.

Now it is a remarkable fact, that, amidst all these revolutions in the church government of *Scotland*, the validity of ordination by Presbyters, was never denied or called in question. We have already seen that Archbishop *Bancroft* pronounced the Presbyterian ordination of *Spotiswood*, *Lamb*, and *Hamilton*, to be valid. But further; in 1610, when Prelacy was first established, the Bishops agreed that the body of the Presbyterian clergy should be considered as regular ministers in the church, on consenting to acknowledge them as their ecclesiastical superiors, without submitting to be re-ordained. And this arrangement was actually carried into effect. Again, in 1661, at the second introduction of Episcopacy, the same

plan of accommodation was agreed upon and executed, though a much smaller number of the clergy submitted to its terms. And, which is a fact no less decisive, at the Revolution in 1688, when Presbyterianism was restored, *four hundred* Episcopal clergymen came into the bosom of the Presbyterian church, acknowledged the validity of her orders and ministrations, and were received into connexion with her on the basis of such acknowledgment. Nor is this all. About the time of the first introduction of Episcopacy into *Scotland*, a number of the people and their clergy, who were all Presbyterian, removed from that country into the north of *Ireland*, where Episcopacy was also established. To accommodate a number of the clergy, who were in this situation, the Bishops in *England* drew up and transmitted to *Ireland* a plan of proceeding in their case, which recognized the validity of their ordination, and by means of which, without being re-ordained, they were actually incorporated with the established church. It is not possible to contemplate this series of facts, without perceiving, as Bishop *Burnet* declares, that, for a long time after the commencement of the Reformation in Great-Britain, the validity of Presbyterian ordination was distinctly and uniformly acknowledged.

It were easy to fill a volume with testimony to the same amount. But it is not necessary. If there be any fact in the history of the British churches capable of being demonstrated, it is, that

their venerable Reformers uniformly acknowledged the other Protestant churches formed on the Presbyterian plan, to be sound members of the universal Church, and maintained a constant and affectionate intercourse with them as such. This is so evident from their writings and their conduct, and has been so fully conceded by the ablest and most impartial judges among Episcopalians themselves, that it would be a waste of time further to pursue the proof.

From the English Reformers let us pass on to those distinguished worthies who were made the instruments of Reformation on the Continent of Europe. *Luther* began this glorious work in *Germany*, in the year 1517. About the same time the standard of truth was raised by *Zuingle*, in *Switzerland*; and soon afterwards these great men were joined by *Carlostadt*, *Melancthon*, *Oecolampadius*, *Calvin*, *Beza*, and others. The pious exertions of these witnesses for the truth were as eminently blessed as they were active and unwearied. Princes, and a multitude of less celebrated divines, came to their help. Insomuch that before the close of that century, numerous and flourishing Protestant churches were planted throughout *Germany*, *France*, *Switzerland*, the *Low-Countries*, *Sweden*, *Denmark*, and various other parts of *Europe*, from the *Mediterranean* to the confines of *Russia*.

Now it is well known that all these Protestants on the continent of *Europe*, when they threw off

the fetters of Papal authority, and were left free to follow the word of God, *without any exception*, recognized the doctrine of ministerial parity, and embraced it not only in theory, but also in practice. They established *all* their churches on the basis of that principle; and to the present hour bear testimony in its favor. This may be abundantly proved, by recurring to their original confessions of faith; to their best writers; and to their uniform proceedings.

When the churches began to assume a systematic and organized form, they were all arranged by ecclesiastical writers under two grand divisions—the *Reformed* and the *Lutheran*. The *Reformed* churches, which were established in *France, Holland, Switzerland, Geneva*, and in some parts of *Germany*, from the beginning, as is universally known, laid aside diocesan *Bishops*; and have never, at any period, had an Episcopal government, either in name or in fact. That these churches might have had Episcopal ordination, and the whole system of Prelacy, continued among them, if they had chosen to retain them, no one can doubt who is acquainted with their history. But they early embraced the doctrine of ministerial *parity*, which had been so generally adopted by preceding witnesses for the truth; and erected an ecclesiastical organization in conformity with this doctrine. Accordingly the venerable founders of those churches, having been themselves ordained *Presbyters* by Romish *Bishops*; believing that the dis-

ference between these two classes of ministers was not appointed by Jesus Christ or his apostles, but invented by the church; and persuaded that, according to the practice of the primitive church, *Presbyters* were fully invested with the *ordaining* power, they proceeded to ordain others, and thus transmitted the ministerial succession to those who came after them.

But it is said, that, although the Reformers of *France, Holland, Geneva, Scotland, &c.* thought proper to organize their churches on the Presbyterian principle of parity; yet that *Calvin, Beza,* and other eminent divines of great authority in those churches, frequently expressed sentiments very favorable to diocesan Episcopacy, and spoke with great respect of the English hierarchy. It is not denied that those illustrious Reformers, on a variety of occasions, expressed themselves in very respectful terms of the church of *England*, as it stood in their day. But whether we consider the sentiments which they expressed, or the circumstances under which they delivered them, no use can be made of this fact favorable to the cause of our opponents. The truth is, the English Reformers, prevented, on the one hand, by the *Crown* and the *Papists*, from carrying the Reformation so far as they wished; and on the other, urged by the *Puritans*, to remove *at once*, all abuses out of the church, wrote to the Reformers at *Geneva*, whom they knew to have much influence in *England*, soliciting their aid, in quieting the minds of the Pu-



ritans, and in persuading them to remain in the bosom of the church, in the hope of a more complete reformation afterwards. Is it wonderful, that, at a crisis of this kind, *Calvin* and *Beza*, considering the church of *England* as struggling with difficulties; viewing *Cranmer* and his associates as eminently pious men, who were doing the best they could in existing circumstances; hoping for more favorable times; and not regarding the form of church government as an *essential*, should write to the English Reformers in a manner calculated to quiet the minds of the Puritans, and induce them to remain in connexion with the national church? This they did. But in all their communications, they never went further than to say, that they considered the hierarchy of *England* as a judicious and respectable *human institution*; and that they could, without any violation of the dictates of conscience, remain in communion with such a church. And what is the inference from this? Could not thousands of the firmest Presbyterians on earth, under similar circumstances, say the same? But did *Calvin* or *Beza* ever say, even in their most unguarded moments, that they considered Prelacy as an institution of *Christ*, or his *Apostles*? Did they ever express a *preference* of this form of government to the Presbyterian form? Did they, in short, ever do more than acknowledge that Episcopacy might, in some cases, be *useful* and *lawful*? But, on the other hand, how much these same Reformers have said against Prelacy, and in favour of ministerial parity;

how strongly they have asserted, and how clearly they have proved, the former to be a human invention, and the latter to have the sanction of apostolic example ; and how decidedly they speak in favour of Presbyterian principles, even in some of their most complaisant letters to the English Reformers, our opponents take care not to state\*. Their caution is politic. For no human ingenuity will ever be able to refute the reasonings which those excellent men have left on record against the Episcopal cause†.

With respect to the *Lutheran* churches, it is known to all well informed persons, that *they* also, from the beginning rejected diocesan Episcopacy, considered as an institution of Christ, and

\* It is almost incredible how far the declarations of *Calvin* on this subject, have been misunderstood and misrepresented. Who would imagine, when that venerable Reformer, in his *Institutes*, represents the Scriptures as affording a warrant for three classes of church officers, viz. *Teaching-Elders*, *Ruling-Elders*, and *Deacons*, that any could interpret the passage as favoring the doctrine of three orders of *clergy*?

† *Beza*, in his celebrated work *De Tripliori Episcopatu*, declares that there are *three* kinds of Episcopacy : The *first*, instituted by Christ, in which all Pastors are equally *Bishops*. This he calls *Divine Episcopacy*. The *second*, instituted by man, in which certain aged and venerable Presbyters are *Presidents* or *Moderators* for life, without any new ordination : this he calls *human Episcopacy*. The *third*, in which prelates are regarded as a superior order, he styles *Satanical Episcopacy*. This statement is introduced merely to show with how little propriety *Beza* can be quoted as a friend to prelacy.

have, to the present time, acted on this principle, acknowledging but *one order* in the Christian ministry. I know that attempts have frequently been made to give a different representation of this matter. Whether these attempts have arisen from ignorance, or from a less excusable source, I will not inquire; but the position which they aim to establish is unquestionably groundless. *Luther*, the great founder of the church which bears his name, gave a practical declaration of his opinion on this subject, by one decisive fact, which is, that, though only in *Priest's* orders, he himself undertook, in 1524, a few years after commencing the work of Reformation, to *ordain*, and, actually performed this rite, with great solemnity. His coadjutors and followers, though of no higher ecclesiastical dignity than himself, did the same. Could more decisive testimony be given as to the principles of the first *Lutherans* on this subject?

It is true, *Luther* and the leading divines of his denomination, differed from *Calvin* and his associates, with respect to one point in church government. The latter totally rejected all ministerial imparity. The former supposed that a system embracing *some degree* of imparity, was, in general, *expedient*; and accordingly, in proceeding to organize their churches, appointed *Superintendants*, who enjoyed a kind of pre-eminence, and were vested with peculiar powers. But they explicitly acknowledged this office to be a *human*, and not a *divine* institution. The *Superintendants* in question were

mere *Presbyters*, and received no new ordination in consequence of their appointment to this office. The opinion of their being a distinct and superior order of clergy, was formally rejected. And all regular Presbyterian ordinations were recognized by the church in which they presided, as valid. Nor have modern *Lutherans* apostatized in any of these points from the principles of their Fathers. In all the *Lutheran* churches in *America*, and in *Europe*, to the south of *Sweden*, there are no *Bishops*. Their *Superintendants*, or *Seniors*, have no other ordination than that of *Presbyters*. When they are not present, other *Presbyters* ordain without a scruple. And the ordinations practised in Presbyterian churches they acknowledge to be as valid as their own; and accordingly receive into full ministerial standing, those who have been ordained in this manner.

The testimony of Dr. *Mosheim*, the celebrated ecclesiastical historian, who was himself a zealous and distinguished *Lutheran*, will doubtless be considered as conclusive on this subject. He remarks; (Vol. 4. p. 287) that “the internal government of the *Lutheran* church is equally removed from “*Episcopacy* on the one hand, and from *Presbyterianism* on the other; if we except the kingdoms “of *Sweden* and *Denmark*, who retain the form of “ecclesiastical government that preceded the Re- “formation, purged, indeed, from the superstition “and abuses that rendered it so odious. This “constitution of the *Lutheran* hierarchy will not

“ seem surprising, when the sentiments of that peo-  
 “ ple with regard to ecclesiastical polity are duly  
 “ considered. On the one hand, they are persuad-  
 “ ed that there is no law of divine authority, which  
 “ points out a distinction between the ministers of  
 “ the gospel, with respect to rank, dignity, or pre-  
 “ rogatives ; and therefore they recede from *Epis-*  
 “ *copacy*. But, on the other hand, they are of opi-  
 “ nion, that a certain subordination, a diversity in  
 “ point of rank and privileges among the clergy,  
 “ are not only highly useful, but also necessary to  
 “ the perfection of church communion, by connect-  
 “ ing, in consequence of a mutual dependence,  
 “ more closely together the members of the same  
 “ body ; and thus they avoid the uniformity of the  
 “ *Presbyterian* government. They are not, how-  
 “ ever, agreed with respect to the extent of this  
 “ subordination, and the degrees of superiority and  
 “ precedence that ought to distinguish their doc-  
 “ tors ; for in some places this is regulated with  
 “ much more regard to the ancient rules of church  
 “ government, than is discovered in others. As  
 “ the divine law is silent on this head, different  
 “ opinions may be entertained, and different forms  
 “ of ecclesiastical polity adopted, without a breach  
 “ of Christian charity, and fraternal union.”

In perfect correspondence with this representa-  
 tion, it is an undoubted fact, that the church of *Eng-*  
*land*, and those of the same sect in this country,  
 consider the *Lutheran* church as being destitute of  
 an authorized ministry, and her ordinations as com-

pletely a nullity as those in Presbyterian churches. You have seen, in our own city, a Lutheran minister, on uniting himself with the Episcopal church, re-ordained\*, and the baptism of his children, which had been performed by the venerable Senior of the Lutheran church in this State, pronounced invalid, and performed a second time by an Episcopal clergyman. If the *Lutherans* are *Episcopalians* in the same sense with the church of *England*, why treat their church with this pointed disrespect? If they have no claim to this title, why, for the purpose of endeavouring to support by the weight of numbers an unscriptural principle, is the contrary insinuated?

But although the Lutherans in *America* and in the south of *Europe* are not Episcopal; perhaps it will be contended, that this form obtains among the Lutherans of *Sweden*. This plea, however, like the former, is altogether destitute of solidity. It is readily granted that the Lutheran churches in that kingdom have officers whom they style *Bishops*; but when we examine the history and the principles of those churches with respect to their clergy, these *Bishops* will be found to have no other character, according to the doctrine of the church of *England*, than that of mere *Presbyters*. For, in the *first* place, all ecclesiastical historians agree, that when the reformation was introduced into *Sweden*, the first ministers who undertook to ordain were only *Pres-*

\* The Rev. *George Strebeck*, late Pastor of *Zion Church*, in *Mott-street*; now Minister of *St. Stephen's Church*, in the *Bowery*.

*byters*: Their ministerial succession, of course, flowing through such a channel, cannot include any ecclesiastical dignity higher than that of *Presbyter*. Further; in the Swedish church, it is not only certain that *Presbyters*, in the absence of those who are styled *Bishops*, ordain common ministers, without a scruple; but it is equally certain, that in the ordination of a *Bishop*, if the other *Bishops* happen to be absent, the more grave and aged of the ordinary pastors supply their place, and are considered as fully invested with the ordaining power. Finally; the Swedish churches explicitly renounce all claim of *Divine right* for their ecclesiastical government. They acknowledge that the Scriptures contain no warrant for more than *one order* of gospel ministers\*; that their system rests on no other ground than *human expediency*; and that an adherence to it is by no means necessary either to the validity or regularity of Christian ordinances.

Several of the foregoing remarks apply to the *United Brethren* or *Moravians*. They, indeed, have *Bishops* in their churches. But they explicitly renounce all claim of *Divine right* for their system. Of course, they utterly deny the *necessity* of Episcopal ordination in order to the institution of a valid ministry. And, in full consistency with this belief, they freely admit into their church, clergymen who have received no other than *Pres-*

\* The Swedish churches wholly discard *Deacons* as an order of clergy.

byterian ordination, without requiring them to be re-ordained. They have, and have long had, a large number of this class actually incorporated with the rest of their clergy, and standing on a perfect level with those who have been ordained by their Bishops\*.

Finally ; in order to swell the list of *Episcopal* churches as much as possible, the *Methodist* church is frequently represented as such ; but how justly, a little examination will evince. Mr. *Wesley*, the venerable Founder of that church, when he undertook, a number of years ago, to digest a plan for its external organization, especially in the *United States*, formally avowed himself to be of the opinion, with Lord Chancellor *King*, that *Bishop* and *Presbyter*, in the Primitive church, were *the same*. And in perfect conformity with this belief, he himself, being only a *Presbyter* in the church of *England*, united with other *Presbyters* in ordaining ministers for his new church. These *Presbyters* ordained the first *Methodist Bishops*, from whom all succeeding ordinations in that body have been derived. So that in the *Methodist* church, there is no other, strictly speaking, than *Presbyterian* ordination to the present hour. In consistency with this acknowledged fact, they receive, without re-ordination, ministers who have been ordained by *Presbyters* alone in other churches. They practise their own ordination, which is acknowledged by themselves to be no

\* See *A Concise Historical Account of the Constitution of the Unitas Fratrum*. 8vo. Lond. 1775.



other than Presbyterian, in *Scotland*, where they are surrounded with Episcopal Bishops, whose ordination might be obtained, if it were deemed *necessary*. In a word, though, for the purposes of government, they have ministers of different titles and ranks; yet they neither possess, nor recognize any higher power than that of *Presbyters*. And, what confirms the representation I have given is, that when Methodist ministers consider it as their duty to enter the Episcopal church, they are always laid under the necessity of practically renouncing their former orders, and submitting to be re-ordained.

If I mistake not, I have now demonstrated, that the whole body of the Reformers, with scarcely any exceptions, agreed in maintaining that ministerial parity was the doctrine of Scripture, and of the primitive church: That all the Reformed churches, excepting that of *England*, were organized on this principle; and that even those great men who finally settled her government and worship, did not consider Prelacy as founded on *Divine appointment*, but only as resting on the basis of *expediency*. In short, there is complete evidence, that the church of *England* stands *alone* in making *Bishops* an order of clergy superior to *Presbyters*; nay, that *every other Protestant church on earth*, has formally disclaimed the divine right of diocesan Episcopacy, and pronounced it to be a mere human invention.

Now is it credible, my Brethren, that a body of *such* men as the early Reformers; men who to

great learning, added the most exalted piety, zeal, and devotedness to the truth; men who counted not their lives dear to them that they might maintain what appeared to them the purity of faith and order in the church; is it credible that *such* men, living in different countries, embarrassed with different prejudices, all educated under the system of diocesan Bishops, and all surrounded with ministers and people still warmly attached to this system: Is it credible, I say, that *such* men, thus situated, should, when left free to examine the Scriptures and the early Fathers on this subject, with almost perfect unanimity, agree in pronouncing Prelacy to be a human invention, and ministerial parity to be the doctrine of Scripture, if the testimony in favor of this opinion had not been perfectly clear and conclusive? It is not credible. We may suppose *Calvin* and *Beza* to have embraced their opinions on this subject from prejudice, arising out of their situation; but that *Luther*, *Melancton*, and all the leading Reformers on the continent of Europe, differently situated, and with different views on other points, should embrace the same opinion; that *Cranmer*, *Grindal*, and other Prelates in *Britain*, though partaking in the highest honors of an Episcopal system, should entirely concur in that opinion; that all this illustrious body of men, scattered through the whole Protestant world, should agree in declaring ministerial parity to be the doctrine of Scripture and of the Primitive church; and all this from mere prejudice, in direct

opposition to Scripture, and early history, is one of the most incredible suppositions that can be formed by the human mind.

I repeat again, the question before us is not to be decided by *human* opinion, or by the *number* or *respectability* of the advocates which appear on either side. We are not to be governed by the judgment of *Reformers*, or by the practice of the *churches* which they planted. But so far as these considerations have any weight, they are clearly and unquestionably on the side of Presbyterian parity.

## LETTER VII.

*Concessions of eminent Episcopalians.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

THE concessions of opponents always carry with them peculiar weight. The opinions of Presbyterians, in this controversy, like the testimony of all men in their own favor, will of course be received with suspicion and allowance. But when decided and zealous Episcopalians; men who stand high as the defenders and the ornaments of Episcopacy; men whose prejudices and interest were all enlisted in the support of the Episcopal system; when these are found to have conceded the main points in this controversy, they give us advantages of the most decisive kind. Some instances of this sort, I shall now proceed to state.

When I exhibit Episcopal Divines as making concessions in favor of our doctrine, none certainly will understand me as meaning to assert, that they were *Presbyterians* in principle. So far from

this, the chief value of their concessions consists in being made by decided friends of Episcopacy. Neither will you understand me to assert, that none of these writers say any thing, in other parts of their works, inconsistent with these concessions. Few men who write and publish much, are at all times so guarded as never to be inconsistent with themselves. It is enough for me to know what language they employed, *when they undertook professedly to state their opinions on the subject before us*, and when they were called upon by every motive to write with caution and precision. You will likewise find most of these writers differing among themselves; some taking higher ground, and others lower. For this you are doubtless prepared, after being informed that there are *three classes of Episcopalians*, as stated in my first letter.

Some of the concessions which might with propriety be here introduced, have been already exhibited in various parts of the foregoing letters. You have been told that Mr. *Dodwell* frankly acknowledges that *Bishops*, as an order superior to *Presbyters*, are not to be found in the New Testament; that such an order had no existence till the beginning of the *second century*; that *Presbyters* were the highest ecclesiastical officers left in commission by the Apostles; and of course, that the first diocesan *Bishops* were ordained by *Presbyters*. On the other hand, Dr. *Hammond*, perhaps the ablest advocate of Prelacy that ever lived, warmly contends, that in the days of the Apostles there were

none but *Bishops*; the *second* grade of ministers, now styled *Presbyters*, not having been appointed till after the close of the canon of Scripture. Now, if neither of these great men could find both *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, as different orders, in the New Testament; however ingeniously they endeavor to extricate themselves from the difficulty, it will amount, in the opinion of all the impartial, to a fundamental concession. In like manner you have seen, that the arguments drawn from the Episcopal character of *Timothy* and *Titus*, from the model of the *Jewish Priesthood*, and from the *Angels* of the Asiatic churches, have been formally abandoned, and pronounced to be of no value, by some of the ablest champions of Episcopacy. The same might be proved with respect to all the arguments which are derived from Scripture in support of the Episcopal cause. But let us pass on to some more general concessions.

The *Papists*, before as well as since the Reformation, have been the warmest advocates for Prelacy, that the church ever knew. Yet it would be easy to show, by a series of quotations, that many of the most learned men of that denomination, of different periods and nations, have held, and explicitly taught, that *Bishops* and *Presbyters* were the same in the primitive church; and that the difference between them, though deemed both useful and necessary, is only a *human institution*. But instead of a long list of authorities to establish this point, I shall content myself with producing *four*, the first

two from *Great-Britain*, and the others from the *Continent of Europe*.

The judgment of the church of *England* on this subject, in the times of Popery, we have in the canons of *Elfrick*, in the year 990, to Bishop *Wolfin*, in which Bishops and Presbyters are declared to be of the same order. To the same amount is the judgment of *Anselme*, Archbishop of *Canterbury*, who died about the year 1109, and who was perhaps the most learned man of the age in which he lived. He explicitly tells us, that, "by the Apostolic institution, all *Presbyters* are *Bishops*."—See his *Commentary* on *Titus* and *Philip*.

In the *Canon Law* we find the following decisive declaration. "Bishop and *Presbyter* were the same in the primitive church; *Presbyter* being the name of the person's age, and *Bishop* of his office. But there being many of these in every church, they determined among themselves, for the preventing of schism, that one should be elected by themselves to be set over the rest; and the person so elected was called *Bishop*, for distinction sake. The rest were called *Presbyters*; and in process of time, their reverence for these titular *Bishops* so increased, that they began to obey them as children do a father." *Just. Leg. Can. I. 21.*

*Gussander*, a learned catholic divine, who flourished in the 16th century, in his *Book of Consultations*, Art. 14. has the following passage: "Whether *Episcopacy* is to be accounted an ecclesiastical

“ order, distinct from *Presbytery*, is a question much  
 “ debated between theologues and canonists. But  
 “ in this one particular, *all parties agree*, That in  
 “ the Apostles’ days there was *no difference* between  
 “ a *Bishop* and a *Presbyter* ; but *afterwards*, for the  
 “ *avoiding of schism*, the Bishop was placed before  
 “ the *Presbyter*, to whom the power of ordination  
 “ was granted, that so peace might be continued in  
 “ the church.”

It has been observed, that all the first Reformers of the church of England, freely acknowledged *Bishops* and *Presbyters* to have been the same in the Apostolic age ; and only defended diocesan Episcopacy as a wise *human appointment*. It was asserted, on high Episcopal authority, in the preceding letter, that Dr. *Bancroft*, then chaplain to Archbishop *Whitgift*, was the *first* Protestant divine in *England*, who attempted to place Episcopacy on the foundation of divine right. In 1588, in a sermon delivered on a public occasion, he undertook to maintain, “ that the Bishops of *England* were a distinct order from Priests, and had superiority over  
 “ them by divine right, and directly from God ; and  
 “ that the denial of it was heresy.” This sermon gave great offence to many of the clergy and laity. Among others, Sir *Francis Knollys*, much dissatisfied with the doctrine which it contained, wrote to Dr. *Raignolds*, Professor of Divinity in the University of *Oxford*, for his opinion on the subject. That learned Professor, who is said to have been the



“ Oracle of the University in his day\*,” returned an answer, which, among other things, contains the following passages.

“ Of the two opinions which your honor mentions in the sermon of Dr. *Bancroft*, the first is that which asserts the superiority which the Prelates among us have over the clergy, to be a divine institution. He does not, indeed, assert this in express terms, but he does it by necessary consequence, in which he affirms the opinion of those that oppose that superiority to be an heresy; in which, in my judgment, he has committed an oversight; and I believe he himself will acknowledge it, if duly admonished concerning it. All that have laboured in reforming the church, for 500 years past, have taught that all Pastors, be they entitled *Bishops* or *Priests*, have equal authority and power by *God's Word*; as first the *Waldenses*, next *Marsilius Petavinus*, then *Wickliffe* and his disciples; afterwards *Huss* and the *Hussites*; and last of all *Luther*, *Calvin*, *Brentius*, *Bullinger*, and *Muscuhus*. Among ourselves we have *Bishops*, the *Queen's Professors of Divinity* in our universities; and other learned

\* Professor *Raignolds* was acknowledged by all his contemporaries to be a prodigy of learning. Bishop *Hall* used to say, that his memory and reading were near a miracle. He was particularly conversant with the *Fathers* and early historians; was a critic in the languages; was celebrated for his wit; and so eminent for piety and sanctity of life, that *Crakenthorp* said of him, that “ to name *Raignolds* was to commend virtue itself.”

“ men, as *Bradford, Lambert, Jewel, Pilkington,*  
 “ *Humphreys, Fulke,* who all agree in this matter;  
 “ and so do *all divines beyond sea that I ever read,*  
 “ and doubtless many more whom I never read.  
 “ But what do I speak of particular persons?  
 “ It is the common judgment of the Reformed  
 “ Churches of *Helvetia, Savoy, France, Scotland,*  
 “ *Germany, Hungary, Poland, the Low-Countries,*  
 “ and *our own,* (the church of England). Where-  
 “ fore, since *Dr. Bancroft* will certainly never pre-  
 “ tend that an *heresy,* condemned by the consent  
 “ of the whole church in its most flourishing times,  
 “ was yet accounted a sound and christian doctrine  
 “ by all these I have mentioned; I hope he will  
 “ acknowledge that he was mistaken when he as-  
 “ serted the superiority which Bishops have among  
 “ us over the clergy, to be *God's own ordinance*†.”  
 Archbishop *Whitgift*, referring to the great atten-  
 tion which *Bancroft's* sermon had excited, observ-  
 ed, that it “ had done good;” but added, that  
 with respect to the offensive doctrine which it con-  
 tained, he “ rather *wished,* than *believed* it to be  
 “ true.”

The same Archbishop *Whitgift*, in his book  
 against *Cartwright*, has the following full and ex-  
 plicit declarations: Having distinguished between  
 those things which are so necessary, that without  
 them we cannot be saved; and such as are so ne-  
 cessary, that without them we cannot *so well* and

† See the letter at large in *Boyc on Episcopacy*, p. 19—19.

conveniently be saved, he adds, " I confess, that in  
 " a church collected together in one place, and at  
 " liberty, government is necessary with the *second*  
 " kind of necessity ; but that any kind of govern-  
 " ment is so necessary that without it the church  
 " cannot be saved, or that it may not be *altered* in-  
 " to some other kind, thought to be *more expedient*,  
 " I *utterly deny*, and the reasons that move me so  
 " to do, be these : The first is, because I find no  
 " one certain and perfect kind of government pre-  
 " scribed or commanded in the Scriptures, to the  
 " church of Christ ; which, no doubt, should have  
 " been done, if it had been a matter necessary to  
 " the salvation of the church. There is no certain  
 " kind of government or discipline prescribed to the  
 " church ; but the same may be altered, as the  
 " profit of the churches requires.—I do deny  
 " that the Scriptures do set down any one certain  
 " kind of government in the church to be perpetu-  
 " al for all times, places, and persons, without al-  
 " teration.—It is well known that the manner and  
 " form of government used in the apostles' time,  
 " and expressed in the Scriptures, neither *is* now,  
 " nor *can*, not *ought* to be observed, *either touching*  
 " *the persons or the functions* \*. We see manifest-

\* It has been said that Archbishop *Whitgift*, in this passage, merely meant to say that *all the details of ecclesiastical discipline* are not laid down in Scripture, nor to be considered as of *divine right*. But he utterly precludes this construction, by declaring that he considers no form of government as of unalterable divine appointment, *either with respect to persons*

“ ly, that, in sundry points, the government of the  
 “ church used in the apostles’ time, *is*, and hath  
 “ been of necessity, *altered*; and that it neither  
 “ may nor can be revoked. Whereby it is plain  
 “ that any one kind of external government per-  
 “ petually to be observed, is no where in the Scrip-  
 “ ture prescribed to the church, but the charge  
 “ thereof is left to the magistrate, so that nothing  
 “ be done *contrary* to the word of God. This is  
 “ the opinion of the best writers; *neither do I know*  
 “ *any learned man of a contrary judgment.*”

Dr. *Willet*, a distinguished divine of the church of England, in the reign of *Elizabeth*, in his *Synopsis Papismi*, a large and learned work, dedicated to that Queen, undertakes professedly to deliver the opinion of his Church on the subject before us. Out of much which might be quoted, the following passages are sufficient for our purpose: “ Of the  
 “ difference between Bishops and Priests, there  
 “ are three opinions: the *first*, of *Aerius*, who did  
 “ hold that all ministers should be equal; and that  
 “ a Bishop *was not*, neither *ought to be* superior to  
 “ a priest. The *second* opinion is the other ex-  
 “ treme of the Papists, who would have not only a  
 “ difference, but a princely pre-eminence of their  
 “ Bishops over the clergy, and that *by the Word of*  
 “ *God*. And they urge it to be so necessary, that

*or functions*. He could scarcely have employed language to express the opinion which we ascribe to him, more perspicuously or decisively.

“ they are no true churches which receive not their  
“ pontifical hierarchy. The *third* opinion is be-  
“ tween both, that although this distinction of  
“ Bishops and Priests, as it is now received, *cannot*  
“ *be proved out of Scripture*; yet it is very necessa-  
“ ry, for the policy of the church, to avoid schisms,  
“ and to preserve it in unity. Of this judgment,  
“ Bishop *Jewel*, against *Harding*, showeth both  
“ *Chrysostom*, *Ambrose*, and *Jerome*, to have been.  
“ *Jerome* thus writeth, ‘ the apostle teaches evi-  
“ dently that Bishops and Priests were the same ;  
“ but that one was *afterwards* chosen to be set  
“ over the rest as a remedy against schism.’ To  
“ this opinion of *St. Jerome*, subscribeth Bishop  
“ *Jewel*, and another most reverend Prelate of our  
“ church, Archbishop *Whitgift*.” p. 273. Dr. *Willet*  
also expressly renounces the argument drawn by  
many Episcopalians from the *Jewish priesthood*.  
In answer to a celebrated Popish writer, who had,  
with great confidence, adduced this argument, to  
support the authority of Bishops, as an order supe-  
rior to Presbyters, he observes: *First*, “ the *High-*  
“ *priest* under the law was a figure of Christ, who  
“ is the High-priest and chief Shepherd of the New  
“ Testament: and therefore this type, being fulfilled  
“ in Christ, cannot properly be applied to the ex-  
“ ternal hierarchy of the church. *Secondly*, if eve-  
“ ry Bishop be this High-priest, then have you  
“ lost one of your best arguments for the Pope,  
“ whom you would have to be the High-priest in

“ the church \*.” 272. This champion of the church of England further concedes: “ That it  
 “ may be doubted whether *Timothy* were so or-  
 “ dained by the apostle Bishop of *Ephesus*, as a  
 “ Bishop is *now* set over his diocese; for then the  
 “ apostle would never have called him so often  
 “ from his charge, sending him to the *Corinthians*,  
 “ to the *Thessalonians*, and to other churches be-  
 “ side. It is most likely that *Timothy* had the place  
 “ and calling of an *Evangelist*.” Again; “ Seeing  
 “ that *Timothy* was ordained by the authority of the  
 “ *eldership*, how could he be a Bishop strictly and  
 “ precisely taken, being ordained by *Presbyters*?”  
 p. 273. Dr. *Willet* also formally gives up the claim  
 that Diocesan Bishops are *peculiarly* the successors of  
 the *apostles*; explicitly conceding that all who preach  
 the gospel, and administer sacraments, are equally  
 entitled to this honor. And, to place his opinion  
 beyond all doubt, he observes, “ Although it cannot  
 “ be denied but that the government of Bishops is  
 “ very profitable for the preserving of unity; yet  
 “ we dare not condemn the churches of *Geneva*,  
 “ *Helvetia*, *Germany*, *Scotland*, that have received  
 “ another form of ecclesiastical government; as  
 “ the Papists proudly affirm all churches which  
 “ have not such Bishops as theirs are, to be no

\* It will be observed, that this zealous Episcopalian not only rejects the argument in favour of Prelacy, drawn from the model of the *Jewish Priesthood*, but also declares it to be a *Popish* argument, and of no value excepting on *Popish* principles.

“ true churches. But so do not our Bishops and  
 “ Archbishops, which is a notable difference be-  
 “ tween the Bishops of the Popish church, and of  
 “ the Reformed churches. Wherefore, as we con-  
 “ demn not those Reformed churches which have  
 “ retained another form of ecclesiastical govern-  
 “ ment; so neither are they to censure our church  
 “ for holding still the ancient regimen of Bishops,  
 “ purged from the ambitious and superstitious in-  
 “ ventions of the Popish prelacy.” p. 276.

Bishop *Bilson*, in his work against *Seminaries*,  
 Lib. I. p. 318. delivers it as his opinion, and con-  
 firms it by quotations from *Jerome*, that “ the  
 “ church was at first governed by the common coun-  
 “ cil of Presbyters; that therefore Bishops must  
 “ understand that they are greater than Presbyters,  
 “ rather by *custom* than the *Lord’s appointment*;  
 “ and that Bishops came in *after* the *Apostle’s*  
 “ time.”

Dr. *Holland*, the King’s Professor of Divinity in  
 the University of *Oxford*, at a public academical ex-  
 ercise, in the year 1608, in answer to a question for-  
 mally and solemnly proposed—*An Episcopatus sit*  
*ordo distinctus a Presbyteratu, eoque superior jure*  
*divino?* i. e. *Whether the office of Bishop be differ-*  
*ent from that of Presbyter, and superior to it, by Di-*  
*vine right*, declared that “ to affirm that there is  
 “ such a difference and superiority, by divine right,  
 “ is most false, contrary to Scripture, to the Fath-  
 “ ers, to the doctrine of the church of *England*, yea  
 “ to the very Schoolmen themselves.”

Bishop *Moreton*, in his *Catholic Apology*, address-  
ed to the Papists, tells them, " That the power of  
" *Order and Jurisdiction* which they ascribe to *Bish-*  
" *ops*, doth, by divine right, belong to all other *Pres-*  
" *byters*; and that to *ordain* is their *ancient right*." The same Prelate, when he was urged by the Arch-  
bishop of *Spalato*, to re-ordain a clergyman from one  
of the foreign Reformed churches, that he might  
be qualified for preferment in *England*, according  
to law, declined it, saying that " it could not be  
" done but to the scandal of the other Reformed  
" churches, wherein he would have no hand."

Bishop *Jewel*, one of the most illustrious advoc-  
ates for diocesan Episcopacy, in the *Defence* of his  
*Apology for the Church of England*, against *Harding*,  
p. 248, has the following remarkable passage. " But  
" what meant *M. Harding* to come in here with the  
" difference between *Priests* and *Bishops*? Think-  
" eth he that *Priests* and *Bishops* hold only by tra-  
" dition? Or is it so horrible an heresy as he mak-  
" eth it, to say, that by the *Scriptures* of God, a  
" *Bishop* and a *Priest* are *all one*? Or knoweth he  
" how far, and to whom he reacheth the name of  
" an heretic? Verily *Chrysostom* saith, "*Inter*  
" *Episcopum, et Presbyterum interest fere nihil*. i. e.  
" 'Between a *Bishop* and a *Priest* there is, in a  
" manner, no difference.' *St. Jerome* saith, some-  
" what in rougher sort, *Audio, quendam in tantam*  
" *eripuisse vecordiam, ut Diaconos Presbyteris, id est,*  
" *Episcopis anteferet: cum Apostolus perspicue doce-*  
" *at, eosdem esse Presbyteros quos Episcopos*. i. e. I



“hear say, there is one become so peevish, that he setteth Deacons before Priests, that is to say, Bishops; whereas the Apostle plainly teacheth us, that Priests and Bishops be all one.” St. *Augustin* also saith, *Quid est Episcopus nisi primus Presbyter, hoc est summus sacerdos?* i. e. ‘What is a Bishop, but the first Priest, that is to say, the highest Priest?’ So saith St. *Ambrose*, *Episcopi et Presbyteri una ordinatio est; uterque, enim, Sacerdos est, sed Episcopus primus est.* i. e. There is but one consecration of Priest and Bishop; for both of them are Priests; but the Bishop is the first. All these, and other more holy fathers, together with St. *Paul*, the Apostle, for thus saying; by *M. Harding’s* advice, must be holden for heretics\*.”

Dr. *Whitaker*, a learned divine of the church of *England*, and Professor of Divinity in the University of *Cambridge*, in his Treatise against *Campion*, the Jesuit, affirms, that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are, by divine right, all one. And, in answer to *Dury*, a zealous hierarchist of *Scotland*, he tells him “That, whereas he asserts, with many words, that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are divers, if he will retain the cha-

\* It ought to be kept in mind, that Bishop *Jewel’s Apology for the Church of England* was laid before the public on the avowed principle, that it contained the doctrine of that Church: and that the work from which the above quotation is made, was ordered to be suspended by a chain, in all the churches in the kingdom, and to be publicly read as a standard of theological instruction. *Strype’s Annals*, II. 100.

“racter of a *modest* divine, he must not so confidently affirm, that which *all men see to be so evidently false*. For what is so well known, says he, as “this which you acknowledge not? *Jesome* plainly writeth that *Elkters* and *Bishops* are the same, and confirmeth it, by many places of Scripture.” The same celebrated *Episcopalian*, in writing against *Bellarmino*, says, “From 2 *Tim.* i. 6, we understand that *Timothy* had hands laid on him by *Presbyters*, who, at that time governed the church in common council;” and then proceeds to speak severely of *Bellarmino* and the *Romish* church, for confining the power of ordination to *Bishops* exclusively of *Presbyters*.

The authority of few men stands higher among the friends of *Prelacy*, than that of *Bishop Hall*, who wrote, and otherwise exerted himself, in favor of the divine right of diocesan *Episcopacy*, with as much zeal and ability as any man of his day. Yet this eminently learned and pious divine, acknowledged the *Reformed* church of *Holland*, where there never have been any diocesan *Bishops*, to be a true church of *Christ*; accepted of a seat in the *Synod of Dort*, in which the articles of faith, and form of government of that church were settled; recognized the deputies from all the *Reformed* churches on the continent, none of whom had received *Episcopal* ordination, as regular ministers of *Christ*; and, when he took leave of the *Synod*, declared that “there was no place upon earth so like *Heaven* as the *Synod of Dort*, and where he should

“ be more willing to dwell.” *Brandt’s Hist.* Sess. 62. The following extract of a Sermon which he delivered in Latin before that venerable Synod, contains a direct and unequivocal acknowledgment of the church of *Holland* as a true church of Christ. It was delivered Nov. 29, 1618 ; and founded on *Eccles. vii. 16.* “ His serene majesty, our King “ *James*, in his excellent Letter, admonishes the “ States General, and in his instructions to us hath “ expressly commanded us, to urge this with our “ whole might, to inculcate this one thing, that you “ all continue to adhere to the common faith, and “ the Confession of your own and the other church- “ es : which if you do, O happy *Holland* ! O chaste “ Spouse of Christ ! O prosperous Republic ! this “ your afflicted Church tossed with the billows of “ differing opinions, will yet reach the harbor, and “ safely smile at all the storms excited by her cruel “ adversaries. That this may at length be obtain- “ ed, let us seek for the things which make for peace. “ We are *Brethren* ; let us also be *Colleagues* ! What “ have we to do with the infamous titles of party “ names ? We are Christians ; let us also be of “ the same mind. We are *one body* ; let us also be “ unanimous. By the tremendous name of the “ omnipotent God ; by the pious and loving bosom “ of our common Mother ; by your own souls ; by “ the holy bowels of Jesus Christ our Saviour, my “ brethren, seek peace ; pursue peace.” See the whole in the *Acta Synodi Nat. Dord. 38.* But this excellent prelate went further. A little more than twen-

ty years after his mission to *Holland*, and when he had been advanced to the Bishoprick of *Norwich*, he published his *Irenicum* (or *Peacemaker*), in which we find the following passage, *Sect. VI.* “ Blessed  
 “ be God, there is no difference, in any essential  
 “ point, between the church of *England*, and her  
 “ sister Reformed churches. We unite in every ar-  
 “ ticle of Christian doctrine, without the least va-  
 “ riation, as the full and absolute agreement be-  
 “ tween their public confessions and ours testifies\*.  
 “ The only difference between us consists in our  
 “ mode of constituting the external Ministry; and  
 “ even with respect to this point we are of one mind,  
 “ because we all profess to believe that it is not an  
 “ essential of the church, (though in the opinion of  
 “ many it is a matter of importance to her well be-  
 “ ing;) and we all retain a respectful and friendly  
 “ opinion of each other, not seeing any reason  
 “ why so small a disagreement should produce any  
 “ alienation of affection among us.” And after pro-  
 posing some common principles on which they  
 might draw more closely together, he adds, “ But  
 “ if a difference of opinion with regard to these  
 “ points of external order must continue, why may

\* It has been long maintained by well-informed persons, that the Fathers, or the most distinguished Reformers of the church of *England* were doctrinal Calvinists; and that the thirty-nine Articles of that church drawn up by them are Calvinistic. If there were any remaining doubt with respect to the accuracy of this representation, the opinion of Bishop *Hall*, here so strongly expressed, would be decisive in its support.

“ we not be of *one heart and of one mind* ? or why  
 “ should this disagreement break the bonds of good  
 “ brotherhood ?” How different the language and  
 the spirit of some modern advocates for the divine  
 right of diocesan Episcopacy !

The same practical concession was made by the  
 eminently learned and pious Bishop *Davenant*,  
 while Professor of divinity in the university of *Cam-*  
*bridge*. He accepted of a seat in the Synod of  
*Dort*, and gave the sanction of his presence and aid  
 in organizing the Presbyterian church of *Holland*.  
 We are informed, indeed, that Bishop *Carleton* and  
 the other English delegates, expressed their opi-  
 nions very fully in the Synod, in favour of the Epis-  
 copal form of government : but their sitting in that  
 body and assisting in its deliberations ; their preach-  
 ing in the pulpits of the Presbyterian ministers of  
*Dort*, and attending on all the public religious ser-  
 vices of the Synod, were among the strongest ac-  
 knowledgments they could make, that they consi-  
 dered the ministrations of non-episcopal ministers as  
 valid.—But Bishop *Davenant* went further. After  
 his advancement to the Bishopric of *Salisbury*, he  
 published a work, in which he urged with much  
 earnestness and force, a fraternal union among *all*  
*the Reformed churches* \*. A plan which, it is obvi-  
 ous, involved in it an explicit acknowledgment that  
 the foreign Reformed churches, most of which

\* *Ad Fraternal Communionem inter Evangelicas Ecclesias  
 restaurandam Adhortatio ; in eo fundata, Quod non dissentiant  
 in ullo Fundamentalibus Catholicæ Fidei Articulis. Cantab. 1640.*

were Presbyterian, were true churches of Christ; and which, indeed, contained in its very title, a declaration that those churches "did not differ from the church of *England* in any fundamental article of Christian faith."

Bishop *Croft's* concessions on this subject are equally candid and decisive. I had occasion in a former letter to take notice of an acknowledgment of the most pointed sort in his work, entitled *Naked Truth*; a work written and published while the author was Bishop of *Hereford*, and powerfully defended by some of the most learned men of his day. The following additional passages from the same work deserve our notice. "The Scripture no where expresses any distinction of order among the Elders. We find there but *two* orders mentioned, Bishops and Deacons. The Scripture distinguisheth not the order of Bishops and Priests; for there we find but one kind of ordination, then certainly but one order; for two distinct orders cannot be conferred in the same instant, by the same words, by the same actions." With respect to the office of *Deacon*, this Bishop entirely coincides with Scripture and the Presbyterian church. In the work above mentioned, (p. 49) he remarks that he will not dispute, "whether this of *Deaconship* be properly to be called an *order* or an *office*, but certainly no *spiritual* order; for their office was to *serve tables*, as the Scripture phrases it, which in plain English, is nothing else but *overseers of the*

“ *poor*, to distribute justly and discreetly the alms  
 “ of the faithful, which the apostles would not trou-  
 “ ble themselves withal, lest it should hinder them  
 “ in the ministrations of the word and prayer. But  
 “ as most matters of this world, in process of time,  
 “ deflect much from the original constitution, so it  
 “ fell out in this business ; for the bishops who  
 “ pretended to be successors to the apostles, by little  
 “ and little, took to themselves the dispensation of  
 “ alms, first by way of inspection over the deacons,  
 “ but at length the total management : and the  
 “ deacons, who were mere lay-officers, by degrees  
 “ crept into the church ministrations, and became a  
 “ reputed spiritual order, and a necessary degree  
 “ and step to the priesthood, of which I can find no-  
 “ thing in scripture, and the original institution, nor  
 “ a word relating to any thing but the ordering of  
 “ alms for the poor.”

Lord *George Digby*, an eminent English noble-  
 man, who flourished in the reigns of *Charles I.* and  
*Charles II.* and who wrote largely on the questions  
 which agitated the church in his day, in a letter to  
 Sir *Kenelm Digby*, on the subject before us, ex-  
 presses himself in the following terms :—“ He that  
 “ would reduce the church *now*, to the form of go-  
 “ vernment in the most *primitive* times, would not  
 “ take, in my opinion, the best nor wisest course ;  
 “ I am sure not the safest : for he would be found  
 “ pecking towards the *Presbytery* of *Scotland*,  
 “ which, for my part, I believe, in point of govern-  
 “ ment, hath a greater resemblance than either yours

“ or ours, to the *first age*, and yet it is never a whit  
 “ the better for it; since it was a form not chosen  
 “ for the best, but imposed by adversity under op-  
 “ pression, which, in the beginning, forced the  
 “ church from what it wished, to what it might;  
 “ not suffering that dignity and state ecclesiastical  
 “ which rightly belonged unto it, to manifest  
 “ itself to the world:—and which, soon afterwards,  
 “ upon the least lucid intervals, shone forth so glo-  
 “ riously in the happier as well as more monarchi-  
 “ cal condition of Episcopacy: of which way of  
 “ government I am so well persuaded that I think  
 “ it pity it was not made betimes an article of the  
 “ *Scottish Catechism*, that Bishops are of divine  
 “ right\*.”

The character of Archbishop *Usher* stands high with Episcopalianism. He was one of the greatest and best of men. His plan for the *Reduction of Episcopacy into the form of Synodical government, received in the Ancient Church*, is well known to every one who is tolerably versed in the ecclesiastical history of *England*. The essential principle of that plan is, that *Bishop* and *Presbyter*, were originally the same order; and that in the primitive church, the Bishop was only a standing *President* or *Moderator* among his fellow *Presbyters*. To guard against the possibility of mistake, the illustrious Prelate declared he meant to restore “ that kind of *Presbyterian government*, which, in the church of *England*, “ had long been disused.” The Archbishop, further,

\* *Jus Divinum Minis. Evang.* II. p. 107.



being asked by *Charles I.* in the *Isle of Wight*,  
“whether he found in antiquity that *Presbyters*  
“alone ordained any?” answered, “*Yes*; and that  
“he could show his Majesty more, even where  
“*Presbyters* alone successively ordained *Bishops*;  
“and brought as an instance of this, the *Presbyters*  
“of *Alexandria* choosing and making their own  
“*Bishops*, from the days of *Mark*, till *Heracles* and  
“*Dionysius*.” The following declaration of the  
same learned dignitary, is also full to our purpose.  
It having been reported of him, that he had ex-  
pressed an uncharitable opinion concerning the  
church of *Holland*, as no true church, because she  
was without diocesan *Bishops*, when they were  
within her reach, if she had chosen to accept them,  
he thus repels the calumny:—“I have ever declared  
“my opinion to be, that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* dif-  
“fer only in *degree*, and not in order; and conse-  
“quently, that in places where *Bishops* cannot be  
“had, the ordination by *Presbyters* standeth valid.  
“Yet, on the other side, holding, as I do, that a  
“*Bishop* hath superiority in degree over a *Pres-*  
“*byter*, you may easily judge, that the ordination  
“made by such *Presbyters*, as have severed them-  
“selves from those *Bishops* unto whom *they had*  
“*sworn canonical obedience*, cannot possibly by me  
“be excused from being *schismatical*. And howso-  
“ever, I must needs think, that the churches which  
“have no *Bishops*, are thereby become very much  
“defective in their government, and that the  
“churches in *France*, who, living under a *Popish*

“ power, cannot do what they would, are more excusable in this defect, than the *Low Countries*, who live under a free state ; yet, for the testifying of my communion with these churches, (which I do love and honour as true members of the church universal,) I do profess, that with like affection I should receive the blessed sacrament at the hands of the *Dutch* ministers, if I were in *Holland*, as I should do at the hands of the *French* ministers, if I were in *Charenton*\*.”

Bishop *Forbes*, a zealous Episcopalian, in his *Irenicum*, explicitly acknowledges, that “ Presbyters have, by divine right, the power of *ordaining*, as well as of *preaching* and *baptizing*.” Lib. II. cap. 11. And again, in the same chapter, he declares, “ that those churches which have not the Episcopal regimen, by no means forfeit the character of true churches on that account, nor lose their ecclesiastical rights.”

The concessions of Dr. *Stillingfleet*, (afterwards Bishop of *Worcester*) on this subject are well known. The avowed object of his *Irenicum*, one of the most learned works of the age in which it appeared, was to show, that no form of church government is prescribed in the word of God ; that the church is at liberty to modify the details of her external order, both with respect to officers and functions, as well as discipline, at pleasure ; and of

\* See the *Judgment of the late Archbishop of Armagh*, 110—123.

course, that ordinations and government by Presbyters are equally valid with those administered by diocesan Bishops. He seems to acknowledge, indeed, that Presbyterian parity, is on the whole, more agreeable to scripture, and to the practice of the primitive church, than Prelacy; but, at the same time, denies that this ought to be considered as establishing the divine right of Presbytery. In the course of this work the learned author exhibits a mass of evidence from scripture and primitive antiquity against the Episcopal claims, and quotes declarations made by some of the most distinguished divines of different ages and denominations, which will doubtless be read with surprise by those who have been accustomed to believe that the whole Christian world, with very little exception, has always been Episcopal.

To destroy the force of Dr. *Stillingfleet's* concessions, it is urged, that he afterwards became *dissatisfied* with this work, and *retracted* the leading opinion which it maintains\*. To this suggestion I will re-

\* The *Irenicum* has been stigmatized by some high-toned Episcopalians, as an hasty, indigested work, written at an early period of the author's life, and soon repented of. The following facts will show how far this representation is correct. After having been several years engaged in the composition of this work, the author published it in 1659, at the age of twenty-four. Three years afterwards, viz. in 1662, he published a *second edition*; and the same year, he gave to the world his *Origines Sacre*. Soon after these publications, he met his diocesan, the celebrated Bishop *Saunderson*, at a

ply, by a quotation from Bishop *White* of *Pennsylvania*, who, in a pamphlet published a few years since, having occasion to adduce the *Irenicum* as an authority against high-church notions, speaks of the performance and its author in the following terms: “As that learned Prelate was afterwards dissatisfied with his work, (though most probably not with that part of it which would have been to our purpose,) it might seem uncandid to cite the authority of his *opinion*. Bishop *Burnet*, his cotemporary and friend, says, (*History of his Own Times*, anno 1661,) To avoid the imputation that book brought on him, he went into the humours of an high sort of people, beyond what became him, perhaps beyond his own sense of things.” “The book, however,” Bishop *White* adds, “was, it seems, easier *retracted* than *refuted*; for though

visitation. The Bishop seeing so young a man, could hardly believe it was *Stillingfleet*, whom he had hitherto known only by his writings; and, after having embraced him, said, *He much rather expected to have seen one as considerable for his age, as he had already shown himself for his learning*. See the *Life of Bishop Stillingfleet*, p. 12—16. When a divine of acknowledged talents and learning, (whatever may be his age,) after spending several years in a composition of moderate length, deliberately commits it to the press; when, after reflecting on the subject, and hearing the remarks of his friends for three years longer, he publishes it a second time; and when, after this second publication, he is complimented for his great erudition, by one of the most able and learned dignitaries of the age, there seems little room for a charge of haste or want of digestion.

“ offensive to many of both parties, it was managed,  
“ (says the same author) with so much learning  
“ and skill, that none of either side ever undertook  
“ to answer it.”

The truth seems to be, that Dr. *Stillingfleet*, finding that the opinions of a number of influential men in the church were different from those which he had advanced in this work ; and finding also that a fixed adherence to them might be adverse to the interests of the established church, in which he sought preferment, he made a kind of vague and feeble recantation ; and wrote in favor of the apostolical origin of Episcopacy. It is remarkable, however, that this Prelate, in answer to an accusation of inconsistency between his early and his latter writings on this subject, assigned another reason besides a change of opinion, viz. that the former were written “ *before the laws were established.*” But in whatever degree his *opinion* may have been altered, his *reasonings* and *authorities* have undergone no change. They remain in all their force, and have never been refuted, either by himself, or by others.

The concessions of Bishop *Burnet* on this subject, are numerous and unequivocal. Several have been already mentioned. Out of many more which might be presented, I select the following declaration—“ I acknowledge *Bishop* and *Presbyter* to be  
“ *one* and the *same office*, and so plead for no new  
“ office-bearer in the church. The first branch  
“ of their power is their authority to publish the

“ Gospel, to manage the worship, and dispense the  
 “ sacraments; and this is all that is of divine right  
 “ in the ministry, in which *Bishops* and *Presbyters*  
 “ are equal sharers. But besides this, the church  
 “ claimeth a power of jurisdiction, of making rules  
 “ for discipline, and applying and executing the  
 “ same; all which is, indeed, suitable to the com-  
 “ mon laws of society, and the general rules of scrip-  
 “ ture, but hath no positive warrant from any scrip-  
 “ ture precept. And all these constitutions of  
 “ churches into Synods, and the Canons of discipline  
 “ taking their rise from the divisions of the world  
 “ into several provinces, and beginning in the se-  
 “ cond, and beginning of the third century, do  
 “ clearly show, that they can be derived from no di-  
 “ vine original, and so were, as to their particular  
 “ form, but of human institution.”

The opinions held by Archbishop *Tillotson*, on  
 this subject, substantially agree with those of  
 Bishop *Burnet*; or, if they differ from them, are  
 even more favorable to Presbyterian church govern-  
 ment. He was decidedly in favour of admitting the  
 dissenting clergy into the church of *England*, without  
 re-ordaining them; and did not scruple to avow that  
 he considered their ordination as equally valid with  
 that which was received from Episcopal Bishops.  
 And, in conformity with this opinion, he advised  
 the Episcopal clergy of *Scotland* to unite with the

\* *Vindication of the Church and State of Scotland*, p. 331.

Presbyterian church in that country, and submit to its government\*.

Archbishop *Wake*, who was a warm friend to Prelacy, and whose character stands high with its advocates, it is well known kept up a constant friendly correspondence with the most eminent Pastors and Professors in *Geneva* and *Holland*; manifested a fraternal regard to them; declared their churches, notwithstanding their difference in discipline and government from his own, to be true churches of Christ; and expressed a warm desire for their union with the church of England, at the head of which he was then placed. In a letter which he wrote to the celebrated *Le Clerc*, of the *Genevan* school, then residing in *Holland*; in the year 1719, there is the following passage. "I freely embrace  
" the Reformed churches, notwithstanding they  
" differ in some respects from that of England. I  
" could wish, indeed, they had retained that moderate  
" Episcopacy, freed from all unjust domination,  
" which obtains among us, and which, if I have any  
" skill in judging on this subject, was received in  
" the church, from the Apostolic age. Nor do I  
" despair of its being restored. If I should not  
" see it myself, posterity will. In the mean time, I  
" am so far from being so uncharitable as to believe  
" that any of those churches, on account of this de-

\* See *Remarks upon the Life of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson*, 8vo. 1754; in which the author, a most violent Episcopalian, acknowledges these facts, and loads him with much abuse on account of them.

“fect, (for so I must be allowed, without invidiousness, to call it) ought to be cut off from our communion; nor can I, by any means, join with certain MAD writers among us, in denying the validity of their sacraments, and in calling in question their right to the name of Christian churches\* . I could wish to bring about, at any price, a more close union between all the Reformed churches.” The same Prelate, in a letter to Professor *Turretin* of *Geneva*, in 1718, speaking of Bishop *Davenant*'s conciliatory opinions, declares that they perfectly coincide with his own, and that he could earnestly wish that all Christians were of the same mind. Another letter, of a more public nature, which he afterwards addressed to the Pastors and Professors of *Geneva*, abounds with similar sentiments; and expresses the most fraternal affection for those Presbyterian worthies† . Nor were these letters written by him merely as a private man, or in the spirit of temporizing politeness; but manifestly with all the deliberation and solemnity of a man who felt his official responsibility.

\* The language employed by the good Archbishop to express his disapprobation of this doctrine is remarkably strong and pointed. He calls those writers who attempt to maintain it, *furiosi*, i. e. *madmen*. If he spoke in this style of such writers in *England*, where diocesan Episcopacy was established by law, and when he was himself at the head of that establishment; what would he have said concerning writers of a similar stamp, at the present day in *America*, where all denominations, with respect to the state, stand on a level?

† See *Appendix III.* to *Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History.*



The learned *Joseph Bingham*, who has written largely and ably in defence of the Episcopacy of the church of England, frankly acknowledges, that “that church does by no means damn or cut off from her communion, those who believe Bishops and Presbyters to be the *same order*. Some of our best Episcopal divines, and true sons of the church of England, *have said the same*, distinguishing between *order* and *jurisdiction*, and made use of this doctrine and distinction to justify the ordinations of the Reformed churches, against the Romanists\*.” *French Church’s Apol.* p. 262.

Dr. *John Edwards*, a learned and respectable divine of the church of England, in a treatise on this subject, after having considered the testimonies of *Clement, Ignatius, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Jerome*, and others, makes the following declaration. “From all these we may gather that the Scripture *Bishop* was the chief of the *Presbyters*; but he was not of a *distinct order* from them. And as for the times after the apostles, none of these writers, nor any ecclesiastical historian, tells us, that a person of an order superior to Presbyters was set over the Presbyters. It is true one single person is recorded to have presided over the College of Presbyters, but this College had the same power with the single person, though

\* It will be distinctly remembered, that all the Reformed Churches, excepting that of *England*, admitted and practised ordination by *Presbyters*.

“ not the particular dignity of Presidentship. The  
 “ short is, the *Bishops* in these times were *Presby-*  
 “ *ters* ; only he that presided over the body of Pres-  
 “ byters was called *Bishop*, while the rest were ge-  
 “ nerally known by the title of *Presbyters* ; and the  
 “ Bishop was still but a Presbyter, as to order and  
 “ function, though, for distinction sake, he was  
 “ known by the name of *Bishop*. He was superior  
 “ to the other Presbyters as long as he executed  
 “ his office, as a chairman in a committee is above  
 “ the rest of the justices whilst he holds that place.  
 “ It was generally the most ancient Presbyter that  
 “ was chosen to preside over the College of Presby-  
 “ ters, but he had no superiority of power. All the  
 “ priority or primacy he had was that of order.  
 “ Here is the ancient pattern. Why is it not follow-  
 “ ed\*? To single Fathers, we may add Councils,  
 “ who deliver the same sense. This, then, is the  
 “ true account of the matter. Bishops were Elders  
 “ or Presbyters, and therefore of the same order ;  
 “ but the Bishops differed from the Presbyters in  
 “ this only, that they were chosen by the Elders to  
 “ preside over them at their ecclesiastical meetings  
 “ or assemblies†. But in after ages, the Presby-

\* Here is an explicit acknowledgment, that the *Episcopacy* of the church of England, and *primitive Episcopacy*, are very different things.

† The *primitive* Bishop, in Dr. *Edwards's* judgment, therefore, corresponds exactly with the *Moderator* or *President*, of our Presbyteries, who is a standing officer, elected at stated periods, who always presides at the meetings of the body to which he belongs, and until a successor is chosen.

“ ters of some churches parted with their liberty  
 “ and right, and agreed among themselves that ec-  
 “ clesiastical matters should be managed by the  
 “ Bishop only.” *Edwards's Remains*, p. 253.

Sir *Peter King*, lord chancellor of *England*, about the beginning of the eighteenth century, published a very learned work, entitled, *An Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship, of the Primitive Church, that flourished within the first 300 years after Christ*. In this work his lordship undertakes to show, “ that a *Presbyter*, in the primitive church, meant a person in holy orders, having thereby an inherent right to perform the whole office of a *Bishop*, and differing from a bishop in nothing, but in having no parish, or pastoral charge.” He further shows, “ that *Presbyters*, in those times of primitive purity, were called by the same titles, and were of the same specific order with *Bishops*; that they ruled in those churches to which they belonged; that they presided in church consistories with the *Bishop*; that they had the power of excommunication, and of restoring penitents; that they confirmed; and that there are clearer proofs of *Presbyters ordaining*, than of their administering the *Lord's Supper*.” The same learned author maintains that there were but two orders of church officers, instituted by the authority of Christ, viz. *Bishops* and *Deacons*—“ and if they ordained but two,” adds he, “ I think no one had ever a commission to add a third, or to split one into two,

“ as must be done, if we separate the order of  
“ Presbyters from the order of Bishops.”

Dr. *Haweis*, an eminent clergyman of the church of *England*, now living, in the *Introduction* to his *Ecclesiastical History*, makes the following decided avowal. “ Having, through divine mercy, obtained grace to be faithful—having in Providence received my education, and been called to minister in the church of England, I have embraced and subscribed her articles, *ex animo*, and have continued to prefer an Episcopal mode of government. But disclaiming all *exclusive* pretensions, and joined to the Lord in one spirit, with all the faithful of every denomination, I candidly avow my conviction, that the true church is *catholic*, or universal; not monopolized by any one body of professing christians, but essentially a *spiritual church*; and consisting only and equally of those who, in every denomination, love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Respecting the *administration* of this church, I am not convinced that the Lord of life and glory left any precise regulations. His kingdom could alike subsist under any species of government; and having nothing to do with this world, was, in externals, to be regulated by existing circumstances. Whether Episcopacy, Presbytery, or the congregational order, be established as the dominant profession, it affects not the body of Christ. The living members, under each of these modes of administration, are alike bound to

“ love one another out of a pure heart fervently; to  
 “ indulge their brethren in the same liberty of  
 “ private judgment which they exercise themselves;  
 “ and ought never to suffer these regulations of  
 “ outward order to destroy the unity of the spirit,  
 “ or to break the bonds of peace.”

The Rev. Mr. *Gisborne*, a distinguished and popular writer, of the church of England, also now living, avows opinions nearly similar to those contained in the preceding quotation. In his *Survey of the Christian Religion*, (chapter xii.) he has the following passage. “ If Christ, or his apostles, en-  
 “ joined the uniform adoption of Episcopacy, the  
 “ question is decided. Did Christ then, or his  
 “ disciples, deliver, or indirectly convey, such an  
 “ injunction? This topic has been greatly con-  
 “ troverted. The fact appears to be this:—that  
 “ the Saviour did not pronounce upon the subject;  
 “ that the Apostles uniformly established a Bishop  
 “ in every district, as soon as the church in that  
 “ district became numerous; and thus clearly  
 “ evinced *their judgment*, as to the form of ecclesi-  
 “ astical government most advantageous, at least  
 “ *in those days*, to christianity; but that they left  
 “ no command which rendered Episcopacy uni-  
 “ versally indispensable in future times, if other  
 “ forms should evidently promise, through local  
 “ opinions and circumstances, greater benefit to re-  
 “ ligion. SUCH IS THE GENERAL SENTIMENT OF  
 “ THE PRESENT CHURCH OF ENGLAND ON THE SUB-  
 “ JECT.”

An eminent layman of the church of *England*, in a work lately published, in the course of some excellent advices for promoting the prosperity of that church, expressly reprobates the exclusive claims for which some zealous hierarchists contend, and pronounces them most mischievous in their operation on the interests of religion. Among many pertinent and judicious remarks on this subject, he makes the following. "A general  
"presumption lies against all extraordinary claims;  
"and on this account, the opposition which is  
"commonly made to them, (though previous to  
"examination) is not absolutely unreasonable.  
"They are marks by which the weakest persons,  
"as well as the weakest causes, are particularly  
"distinguished. In this kind of competition, the  
"empiric, the pedant, and the sophist, will far out-  
"strip the skilful physician, the able scholar, and the  
"profound philosopher. The same observation is  
"applicablé to bodies of men, ecclesiastical as well  
"as civil. Hence the high claims of the Romish  
"church afford the Protestants one of their most le-  
"gitimate presumptions against her. From her  
"claim of right to an absolute dictatorial authority,  
"we presume the contrary; from her claim to  
"apostolic purity in her faith, worship, government,  
"and discipline, we presume upon her corruption  
"in each. From her denial of salvation to those  
"that are without her pale, we presume it to be  
"peculiarly hazardous to be found within it. Thus  
"by her ambitious or fanatical endeavours to exalt

“ herself above other churches, she supplies them,  
 “ and her adversaries in general, with a forcible  
 “ plea against herself.” Again—“ Suppose a  
 “ church to give a decided preference to Episcopal  
 “ government, not considering it as absolutely es-  
 “ sential to her being, but as conducive to her well-  
 “ being ; not as indispensably *necessary*, but *expe-*  
 “ *dient* ; and this chiefly in respect to her own edi-  
 “ fication, without any positive determination as to  
 “ other churches ; it is almost impossible that a  
 “ preference thus qualified should occasion any con-  
 “ test or animosity. But if she assert such a go-  
 “ vernment to be of indispensable *divine right*, and  
 “ set up a claim which nullifies the sacraments and  
 “ administrations of other churches, *she must expect*  
 “ *to encounter the most violent opposition*. On the  
 “ other hand, should a church, on account of the  
 “ parity of her ministers, exalt herself above other  
 “ churches, and look down on the Episcopal order,  
 “ in its most primitive state, as something Popish  
 “ and antichristian ; she can hardly fail, by such  
 “ an extravagance, to diminish her credit with all  
 “ impartial by-standers\*.”

The opinions and the declarations of Dr. *White*,  
 the present Bishop of the Episcopal churches in  
*Pennsylvania*, will have weight with all Episcopa-  
 lians. In a pamphlet published by him, a few  
 years ago, entitled *The Case of the Episcopal Churches*  
*in the United States considered*, the principal object

\* *Christian Politics*, by *Ely. Bates*, Esq. Part. II. Sect. 5.  
 Second edition, 1806.

of which was to recommend a temporary departure from the line of Episcopal succession, on the ground that Bishops could not then be had, we find the following passage.—p. 28. “ Now if even those  
 “ who hold Episcopacy to be of divine right, con-  
 “ ceive the obligation to it not to be binding when  
 “ that idea would be destructive of public worship ;  
 “ much more must *they* think so, who indeed venerate and prefer that form as the most ancient and  
 “ eligible, but *without any idea of divine right in the*  
 “ *case*. This the author believes to be the sentiment of the great body of Episcopalians in *America* ; in which respect they have in their favor,  
 “ *unquestionably*, the sense of the church of *England* ; and, *as he believes*, the opinions of her  
 “ most distinguished prelates for piety, virtue, and  
 “ abilities \*.”

Another instance of concession from an eminent Episcopalian, is that of the present Bishop of *Lincoln*, who, in his *Elements of Christian Theology*, a work of great authority and popularity in the church of England at this time, expresses himself in the following terms. “ Though I flatter myself  
 “ that I have proved Episcopacy to be an apostolical institution ; yet I readily acknowledge, that  
 “ there is no precept in the *New-Testament*,

\* It will be observed, that I am not alone in supposing that the great body of the church of *England*, both clergy and laity, reject the *divine right* of prelacy. A Bishop of the highest reputation in the Episcopal church in the United States, has pronounced that this is *unquestionably* so.



“ which commands that every church should be  
“ governed by Bishops. No church can exist  
“ without *some* government. But though there must  
“ be rules and orders for the proper discharge of the  
“ offices of public worship; though there must be  
“ fixed regulations concerning the appointment of  
“ ministers; and though a subordination among  
“ them is *expedient*, in the highest degree; yet it  
“ does not follow that all these things must be  
“ precisely the same in every Christian country.  
“ They may vary with the other varying circum-  
“ stances of human society; with the extent of a  
“ country, the manners of its inhabitants, the na-  
“ ture of its civil government, and many other pe-  
“ culiarities which might be specified. As it hath  
“ not pleased our Almighty Father to prescribe any  
“ particular form of civil government, for the se-  
“ curity of temporal comforts to his rational crea-  
“ tures; so neither has he prescribed any particu-  
“ lar form of ecclesiastical polity, as absolutely ne-  
“ cessary to the attainment of eternal happiness.  
“ The scriptures do not prescribe any particular  
“ form of church government.” Vol. II. p. 383, &c.

To the foregoing quotations, I shall only add, that a number of the most learned divines of the church of *England*, when writing on other subjects, have indirectly made concessions quite as decisive as any that have been mentioned. Almost every divine of that church who has undertaken to explain the prophetic parts of the sacred writings, has represented the Reformed Churches as “ the Lord’s

sealed ones ;” as his “anointed ones ;” as the “ witnesses against the man of sin ;” as the “ saints of the Most High ;” as having “ the temple of God,” and his “ altar.” Among many that might be named in confirmation of this remark, the ingenious and excellent Mr. *Faber*, in a work published in the course of the last year, (1806,) and which has received the decided approbation of his diocesan, expressly applies to the German Protestants, those prophecies which represent the purest part of the Christian church. He dates the death of the witnesses at the battle of *Mulburg*, in April, 1547, and their resurrection at *Magdeburgh*, in the year 1550. He does not claim for the church of *England* even the first rank among the witnesses, and much less the exclusive title to that honor.

The foregoing quotations are only a small specimen of what might have been produced, if our limits admitted of their being further multiplied. Nothing would be more easy than to fill a volume with concessions of similar import ; concessions made, not by men of obscure name and small learning ; but by divines of the most exalted character, for talents, erudition, and piety, that ever adorned the church of *England* ; divines who shared her highest dignities, and who gave the most unquestionable evidence of attachment to her constitution. Those which we have detailed, however, are abundantly sufficient. They prove that Presby-

terians are not alone in considering the *Fathers* as favorable to the doctrine of ministerial parity; that the great body of the Reformers, and other witnesses for the truth, in different ages and nations, were, in the opinion of enlightened Episcopalians, friends and advocates of the same doctrine; that the notion of the exclusive and unalterable divine right of diocesan Episcopacy, has been not only rejected, but even reprobated, by some of the greatest divines of the church of *England*, in more indignant and severe language than I have permitted myself to use in the preceding pages; and that the most competent judges have considered a large majority of the English clergy, at all periods since the reformation, as advocates of the constitution of their national church, not on the principle of *divine right*, but of *human expediency*.

## LETTER VIII.

*Rise and Progress of Prelacy.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

**W**HEN we have proved that the Apostolic church existed without diocesan Bishops, we have done enough. No matter how soon after the death of the apostles, and the close of the sacred canon, such an order of ministers was introduced. Whether the introduction of this order were effected in four years, or four centuries after that period, it equally rests on *human* authority alone, and is to be treated as a mere contrivance and *commandment of men*. We cannot too often repeat, nor too diligently keep in view, that the authority of Christ can be claimed for nothing which is not found, in some form, in his own word.

But our Episcopal brethren, forgetting this great principle of the Reformation, when we acknowledge that prelacy existed in the *fourth century*, attempt to found on this fact an argument in favor of their cause. Their argument is this: "Bishops, as an order superior to Presbyters, are confessed to have

“ existed in the fourth century. Now in what man-  
“ ner shall we account for the *introduction* of such  
“ an order? Can any man believe that it was an  
“ innovation foisted in by human ambition within  
“ the first three hundred years? Is it supposable  
“ that men of so much piety, self-denial, and zeal,  
“ as the ministers of the primitive church are ge-  
“ nerally represented to have been, would be dis-  
“ posed to usurp an unscriptural authority? Had  
“ they any temptation to do this, when, by gaining  
“ ecclesiastical pre-eminence, they only became  
“ more obnoxious to the fury of persecution? But  
“ even supposing them to have been so ambitious  
“ and unprincipled as to attempt this encroachment  
“ on the rights of others, can we imagine that such  
“ an attempt would have been successful? Would  
“ the *rest of the clergy* have quietly submitted to  
“ the usurpation? Would the *people* have endured  
“ it? In a word, is it credible that so great a  
“ change should have taken place in the constitu-  
“ tion of the church, without opposition, without  
“ noise; without leaving in the records of antiquity  
“ some traces of the steps by which it was ac-  
“ complished? No; it is not credible. It is  
“ impossible. The inference then is, that no  
“ such alteration ever took place; that Bishops, as  
“ an order superior to Presbyters, have existed in  
“ the Christian church from the beginning, and  
“ consequently are of apostolical origin.” This is  
the substance of an argument, which the celebrat-  
ed *Chillingworth* ventures to style “ *demonstra-*

tion\*," and on which great stress has been laid by all succeeding Episcopal writers.

But to invalidate this reasoning, which scarcely deserves to be called specious, nothing more is necessary than a little attention to a few plain facts. From these facts it will appear, that, considering the character and circumstances of the church, from the close of the second to the beginning of the fourth century, nothing was more likely to happen than such an usurpation and change as are here supposed:—That changes quite as inconsistent with primitive purity, and quite as likely to excite opposition and noise, are acknowledged on all hands, actually to have taken place during that period, without our being able to find in the records of antiquity, any distinct account of the manner in which they were introduced:—And that, notwithstanding every plausible theory to the contrary, there is abundant evidence that the precise change which our opponents pronounce impossible, did, in fact, gradually gain admittance into the church, after the close of the second century, and produced an important revolution in its aspect and government.

The desire of pre-eminence and of power is natural to man. It is one of the most early, powerful,

\* It is not meant to be asserted that *Chillingworth* was the first writer who stated and urged this argument. It is of *Popish* origin, and, among others, was employed with great confidence by *Bellarmino*, against the Protestants of his day in support of prelacy, and several other corruptions of the church of *Rome*. See his work *De Notis Ecclesiæ*. Lib. 4. Cap. 5.

and universal principles of our nature. It reigns without control in wicked men, and has more influence than it ought in the minds of the most pious. Accordingly, we find the criminal operation of this principle disclosing itself even under the eye of our Saviour himself. The sons of *Zebedee*, filled with ambition, came to their Lord with a formal request, that they might be promoted to places of distinguished rank in his kingdom. *Mark 10, 37.* And even on that solemn night in which Christ was betrayed, when he had just dispensed to the twelve apostles the sacrament of the last supper, and had informed them that the hour of his departure was at hand; when they were still seated in his presence, and might be expected to be under the influence of all the devout and humble feelings which such a scene, and such a disclosure, were calculated to inspire, *there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.* *Luke 22, 24.* The same principle continued to manifest itself after the ascension of the Saviour. The apostles repeatedly caution the ministers of their day against a spirit of covetousness and ambition, and especially against *lording it over God's heritage*; plainly intimating, either that in the midst of all the persecution to which the church was exposed, they perceived such a criminal disposition arising; or that they foresaw that it was likely to arise. The Apostle *Paul* more than once represents himself as called to struggle with the ambitious pretensions of Christian minis-

ters, who sought unduly to exalt themselves : and the apostle *John* informs us, that a certain *Diotrephes*, who loved to have the pre-eminence in the church, violently opposed the apostolic ministry, because he considered it as unfavorable to his plans of selfishness and domination. If such a disposition were exhibited while the apostles were still alive ; while the gifts of inspiration and miracles were still enjoyed by the church ; and while the precepts and example of the Saviour were so fresh in the memory of his people, what might not have been expected to appear in three centuries afterwards, when the state of the church exhibited, in almost every respect, a lamentable degeneracy ?

We are accustomed to look back to the first ages of the church with a veneration nearly bordering on superstition. It answered the purposes of Popery, to refer all their corruptions to primitive times, and to represent those times as exhibiting the models of all excellence. But every representation of this kind must be received with distrust. The Christian church, during the apostolic age, and for half a century afterwards, did indeed present a venerable aspect. Persecuted by the world, on every side, she was favored in an uncommon measure with the presence and spirit of her Divine Head, and exhibited a degree of simplicity and purity, which has, perhaps, never since been equalled. But before the close of the *second century*, the scene began to change ; and before the commence-



ment of the *fourth*, a deplorable corruption of doctrine, discipline, and morals, had crept into the church, and disfigured the body of Christ. *Hege-sippus*, an ecclesiastical historian, who wrote in the second century, declares that the *virgin purity* of the church was confined to *the days of the apostles*. Nay, *Jerome* tells us, that "the primitive churches were tainted with gross errors, while the apostles were alive, and the blood of Christ yet warm in *Judea*." *Cyprian*, in the third century, complained of universal depravity among the clergy, as well as the laity. He declares, "We observe not the will of the Lord, having all our mind and study set upon lucre and possessions, are given to pride, full of emulation and dissension, and void of simplicity and faithful dealing." And again, the same writer complains, that "the priests had no devotion, the deacons no fidelity; that there was no charity in works, no discipline in manners." *Eusebius*, describing the state of the church towards the close of the third century, gives the following representation. "Bishops rushed against Bishops. Most detestable hypocrisy and dissimulation advanced even to the very height of wickedness. We were not touched with any sense of the divine judgment creeping in upon us, nor used any endeavours to regain his favor; but wickedly thinking that God neither did regard nor would visit our crimes, we heaped one wickedness upon another. Those who seemed to be our *Pastors*, rejecting the rule of piety, were inflamed with

“ mutual contentions against one another ; and  
“ while they were only taken up with contentions,  
“ threatenings, emulation, mutual hatred, and en-  
“ mity, every one eagerly pursued his ambition in a  
“ tyrannical manner.”

After such descriptions as these, let us hear no more of the primitive church being so pure, and all her ministers so humble and disinterested, as to preclude the probability of any of them being actuated by ambition, or disposed to usurp unscriptural authority. All authentic history shows that such a conclusion is as false in fact, as it is inconsistent with the uniform character of human nature. Yes ; that *mystery of iniquity* which began to work under the ministry of our Saviour himself, and which retarded the growth of the church, while it was watered with the tears and the blood of the apostles, might be expected to prove, as it did, in a much greater degree, her bane, in after times. But, perhaps it will be said, that, although some of the clergy in the second and third centuries, were ambitious, and disposed to usurp unscriptural power ; yet we cannot suppose that their claims would have been calmly yielded, and their usurpations submitted to without a struggle, by the other clergy, and by the body of the people. If, then, such claims were made, and such usurpations effected, why do we not find in the early history of the church, some account of changes so memorable, and of conflicts so dreadful, as must have attended their introduction ?

In answer to this question, let it be remembered, that the nations over which the Christian religion was spread with so much rapidity during the first three centuries, were sunk in deplorable ignorance. Grossly illiterate, very few were able to read; and even to these few, manuscripts were of difficult access. At that period, popular eloquence was the great engine of persuasion; and where the character of the mind is not fixed by reading, and a consequent habit of attention and accurate thinking, it is impossible to say how deeply and suddenly it may be operated upon by such an engine. A people of this description, wholly unaccustomed to speculations on government; universally subjected to despotic rule in the state; having no just ideas of religious liberty; altogether unfurnished with the means of communicating and uniting with each other, which the art of printing has since afforded; torn with dissensions among themselves, and liable to be *turned about with every wind of doctrine*; such a people could offer little resistance to those who were ambitious of ecclesiastical power. A fairer opportunity for the few to take the advantage of the ignorance, the credulity, the divisions, and the weakness of the many, can scarcely be imagined. In truth, under these circumstances, ecclesiastical usurpation is so far from being improbable; that, to suppose it not to have taken place, would be to suppose a continued miracle.

Nor is there more difficulty in supposing that these encroachments were submitted to by the

“The administering the *Lord’s supper* to *infants*, was a corruption which early arose in the church. It is certain that this corruption existed in the *second* century. *Cyprian*, in the *third* century, speaks of it not as a new thing, but as an ordinary practice. *Augustin*, some time afterwards, calls it an *Apostolical tradition*, represents it as a *general* custom, and expressly founds the propriety and necessity of it on *John* vi. 53. And this practice prevailed so *long*, that Bishop *Bossuet*, in a treatise on the Communion, traces it down to the twelfth century. Now that this practice had no foundation either in scripture or apostolic example, is conceded by the whole Christian world. How, then, shall we account for its introduction and general adoption in the church? Can any one tell *when* it was introduced? *By whom*? Whether it met with any *opposition*? Whether among the faithful of that day, any church refused to adopt it? And why we are not able to find in all antiquity, an account of any disputes and struggles which took place on this subject? I will venture to say that no man can give any authentic and satisfactory information on any of these points. Of course, on the principle assumed by our Episcopal brethren, we are compelled to conclude, that this practice was not an innovation, but derived from the apostles. This case is even stronger than that which it is brought to illustrate; for as, on the one hand, there was *less temptation*, on the ordinary principles of human nature, to adopt this unscriptural abuse of the Eucharist, than to

contrive and extend ecclesiastical domination; so, on the other, it was more likely to strike the mind at once with disgust, and to make an unfavorable impression on the mass of the people.

Another instance of acknowledged, and most remarkable usurpation, within the period which we are considering, is the pre-eminence which *Archbishops* and *Metropolitans* claimed over the *ordinary Bishops*. All protestant Episcopalians allow that Bishops are, by divine right, *equal*; and, of course, that *Archbishops*, *Metropolitans*, and *Patriarchs*, are grades of mere *human invention*. But it is certain that an inequality of rank among Bishops began to take place in the church so *early*, became in a little while so *general*, and was introduced with so little *opposition* and noise, that some have undertaken, on this very ground, to prove that it was of apostolical origin. Yet our opponents in this controversy, with one voice allow, that no warrant is to be found for it either in scripture or in primitive practice. How then (to adopt their own argument) was this inequality introduced? Can we suppose that any of the pious Bishops began to be so early infected with ambition as to usurp unscriptural authority? Or can we suppose that the other Bishops would quietly submit to such usurpation? No; on the principles of Episcopal reasoning, we must conclude that no such usurpation was possible; and that *Archbishops*, and *Metropolitans* existed from the beginning. But how does the mist of false theory vanish before the light of truth and fact!

Closely connected with the introduction of *Archbishops*, and other grades in the Episcopal office, is the rise and progress of the *Papacy*. It is certain that the anti-christian claims of the Bishop of *Rome* were begun before the close of the second century. The writings of *Irenæus* and *Tertullian*, both furnish abundant evidence of this fact. Yet the records of antiquity give so little information respecting the various steps by which this "man of sin" rose to the possession of his power; they contain so little evidence of any efficient opposition to his claims; and represent the submission of the other Bishops as being so early and general, that the Papists attempt, from these circumstances, to prove the divine origin of their system. Yet what Protestant is there who does not reject this reasoning as totally fallacious, and conclude that the supremacy of the Bishop of *Rome* is an unscriptural usurpation? And although the most impartial and learned divines may and do differ among themselves in fixing the several dates of the rise, progress, and establishment of this great spiritual usurper; yet the *fact*, that he did thus rise, and advance, and erect a tyrannical throne in the church, contrary to all that might have been expected both from the piety and the selfishness of the early Christians, is doubted by none.

Scarcely less remarkable, or in itself improbable, was the change which early took place in the mode of *electing* and *installing* the Pastors of the church. You have been informed in preceding

parts of this work, that, as each Bishop, in the primitive church, was the Pastor of a single congregation; so every Bishop was elected by *the people* of his charge, and ordained to the work of the ministry *in their presence*. It is certain, however, that at least as early as the fourth century, this power of electing their own Bishops began to be gradually taken away from the people; and that in the course of two or three centuries afterwards, the privilege was almost wholly withdrawn from them. But how came a right so popular, and so highly prized, to be tamely surrendered? And why is it that the records of antiquity furnish so little information on this subject; insomuch that we scarcely know any thing more than the two great facts, that this right of popular election was once enjoyed, and that it was soon afterwards taken away? It is of little importance how these questions may be answered by different theorists. It is enough for us to know that the facts are established; and that the same principles of reasoning apply to this case, as to the main point in dispute with our Episcopal brethren.

The abolition of the office of *Ruling Elder*, through the greater part of the Christian world, is another signal instance of early departure from the model of the primitive church. The New Testament speaks of this class of officers as existing in the apostolic age. Several early writers of reputation, as we have seen, allude to them; and *Hilary*, who wrote in the fourth century, expressly de-

clares, that they once existed in the church, but were gradually discontinued. And, though he professes not to be able fully to explain the reason of their falling into disuse, yet he refers it to the *pride* and *ambition* of the *clergy*, who were unwilling to have officers of this class sitting with them, and judging in the affairs of the church. Here a difficulty occurs quite as great, and of the same kind as that which our Episcopal brethren urge in the case before us. How shall we account for these *Elders* consenting to be deprived of their office, and banished from the church? How shall we account for the *people* yielding to this encroachment on their rights? Could a change so important and extensive have taken place without a struggle? Why is it, then, that we find no account of this struggle in the records of antiquity? We may not be able to return decisive and satisfactory answers to these questions: but the great fact, that the change to which they refer, *did* take place; and that it was effected gradually, and without any violent struggle, at least so far as history has informed us, are truths abundantly established.

This enumeration of early departures from primitive purity, might be greatly extended, were it either necessary, or consistent with our limits. I might show, that before the close of the *second* century, *Sub-deacons*, *Acolyths*, *Exorcists*, and other officers of inferior grade, who had no place in the Apostolic church, were introduced by human pride



and folly, and employed as means of elevating the clergy, and of placing them at a greater distance from the people. *When* these unauthorized offices were first instituted, we are no where informed. *By whom*, or by what *means* they were introduced, we are equally ignorant. But the fact, that they did creep into the church without any other than human authority, is undeniable.

All these deviations from primitive usage took place at an *early period*. They were of a nature calculated to interest the feelings both of the clergy and of the people, and to excite long and violent *opposition* from various quarters. Yet the records of antiquity give us no satisfactory information concerning any such opposition, or the steps by which these innovations were introduced. Now what good reason can be assigned, why that *particular kind* of clerical usurpation which Presbyterians assert to have taken place, should appear more improbable and incredible, than the instances of similar usurpation which are universally acknowledged? Does not every man of common sense see that the former was quite as likely to happen as the latter? Nay, is it not evident that some of the latter are much more difficult to be accounted for than the former? Yes; precisely the same reasoning that will enable us to account for the introduction of *Archbishops*, for the abolition of the office of *Ruling Elders*, and for the discontinuance of the *popular election* of Bishops, will also enable us with even more ease, to explain the fact,

that some of the Pastors of the churches, within an hundred years after the Apostolic age, should succeed in gradually encroaching on the rights of their equals, and in appropriating to themselves titles and honours which originally belonged to every pastor.

Nor is it wonderful that we find so little said concerning these usurpations in the early records of antiquity. There was probably but little written on the subject; since those who were most ambitious to shine as writers, were most likely to be forward in making unscriptural claims themselves; and, of course, would be little disposed to record their own shame. It is likewise probable, that the little that was written on such a subject, would be lost; because the art of *printing* being unknown, and the trouble and expense of multiplying copies being only incurred for the sake of possessing *interesting* and *popular* works, it was not to be expected, that writings so hostile to the ambition and vices of the clergy, would be much read, if it were possible to suppress them. And when to these circumstances we add, that literature, after the fourth century, was chiefly in the hands of ecclesiastics; that many important works written within the first three centuries are known to be lost; and that of the few which remain, some are acknowledged on all hands, to have been grossly corrupted, and radically mutilated, we cannot wonder that so little in explanation of the various steps of clerical usurpation has reached our times.

I have now shown, that a change in the character and powers of some of the primitive Bishops was *possible*, and even *probable*. I have shown that changes quite as likely to be vigorously resisted, and to occupy a large space in the early history of the church, were in fact early introduced, without any proof of such resistance being found in the scanty and mutilated records of antiquity. We are under no obligation to go further. What has been said is abundantly sufficient to refute the Episcopal argument. If prelatial Bishops are nowhere to be found in Scripture, but are found in the records of the fourth century; then to show that their introduction, within the first three hundred years was *practicable*, is all that a reasonable Episcopalian can demand. But this, though sufficient to silence our opponents, may not satisfy an inquisitive antiquarian. It remains, then, to take one step further, and to show, that the change which has been proved to be *practicable*, and even *probable*, did *actually take place*; that it is not a mere *hypothesis*, adopted without evidence, but a *matter of fact*, which the historian ought not to overlook, even if it were wholly unconnected with modern controversies. The proof of this fact shall be drawn from the following sources:

*First*; From a comparison of the *general language* of Scripture, and the writers of the first two centuries, concerning Bishops, with the *general language* used on the same subject in the fourth century. We have before shown, that in the New-

Testament, the titles *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are indiscriminately applied to the same persons; and that no style of expression is employed by the Spirit of God, which gives the least intimation that *Bishops* were an order distinct from, and superior to, *Presbyters* in the Apostolic age. We have also shown, that the same indiscriminate application of scriptural titles, and the same language expressive of ministerial parity, are found, with scarcely any exception, in all the authentic writings of the first two hundred years. It is not necessary here to repeat the proof of these positions. They will therefore be assumed as established points. But in the writings of the third century, we begin to perceive a style of expression indicating the commencement of a distinction between *Bishops* and *Presbyters*; and in the fourth and fifth centuries; we find this distinction strongly and generally marked. In short, that, in the course of the first three hundred years after Christ, there was gradually introduced a remarkable change of language, in speaking of the titles and powers of Christian ministers, is admitted, not only by a great majority of ecclesiastical historians, and of other learned men, but also by many of the best informed, and most impartial Episcopalians themselves. Now whence did this change in the current language of that period arise? Not from accident, not from the caprice of a few individuals. Neither of these would be sufficient to account for a change so important and extensive. It arose evidently from a change

in the nature of the offices expressed by this language. It arose from the fact, that in the Apostolic age, and for more than a hundred years afterwards, prelatical Bishops had no existence; and that in the fourth century, this class of officers, as a distinct order, had been introduced, and of course, required new distinctions, or a new use of terms and titles to designate their character.

*Secondly*; That *Bishops*, as an order of clergy superior to *Presbyters*, were introduced *after* the Apostolic age, and without any divine warrant, may also be established by the declarations of several approved writers, who lived near the time when this change occurred, and who expressly assert that it took place. The quotations from *Jerome*, *Hilary*, *Chrysostom*, &c. detailed in the *fifth* letter, are equally clear and decisive on this subject. The declarations of *Jerome*, in particular, are so pointed and unquestionable, so formally stated, and repeated in such a variety of forms, that they must silence even prejudice and sophistry themselves. Were not these learned men as likely to *understand* the subject on which they wrote as any of the present day? Is it credible that they should be *totally deceived* concerning a fact, which, if it did not fall under their own observation, must have been personally witnessed by their immediate predecessors? It is not credible. Yet unless we suppose these writers to have been either deceived or dishonest, the Presbyterian or Apostolic form of church government, was gradually set aside and gave

place to Prelacy, within three hundred and fifty years after Christ.

*Thirdly*; On the supposition that diocesan Episcopacy was a mere human invention, introduced long after the Apostolic age, we might expect to find this form of ecclesiastical government first embraced in populous and wealthy cities, and making its way more slowly in the remote and obscure parts of the church. And accordingly we find this to have been precisely the fact. Prelacy was first introduced and organized in *Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, &c.* From these, as from so many centres, it spread into the neighbouring countries, and finally became general. But in the parts of the church which were placed at the greatest distance from these seats of corruption, the reception of Prelacy was considerably later. *Hilary* and others declare, that many of the *African* Presbyters continued to exercise the *ordaining* power until the middle of the *fourth* century. The churches in *Scotland* remained *Presbyterian* in their government, from the introduction of Christianity into that country, in the *second* century, until the *fifth* century, when *Palladius* succeeded in introducing diocesan Bishops\*. It also appears, from the most authentic history, that the *country* churches generally maintained the primitive plan of government much longer than those of the cities, and were from one to two centuries later in receiving

\* This fact is ascertained by the writings of *Major, Fordon, Boethius,* and Archbishop *Usher.*

Episcopacy as a superior order. The ministers of these country congregations, were called *Chorepiscopi*, or *Country-Bishops*. They continued to exercise full Episcopal powers a considerable time after the Presbyters within and near the great cities had become subject to diocesans ; until at length the influence of the Bishop of *Rome*, and of some other ambitious prelates, procured a decree of the Council of *Sardis* to suppress the *Chorepiscopi* entirely\*. The churches of the vallies in *Savoy* and *Piedmont*, were still more successful in supporting primitive Episcopacy. Although they retained the term *Bishop* in its original meaning, yet they rejected the government of prelatical Bishops, as well as the authority of the Pope, and continued to set an example of ministerial parity for many centuries. All these circumstances prove that diocesan Episcopacy was an innovation. If it had been the Apostolical model, and especially if it had been deemed so important and fundamental as our opponents represent it to be, then those churches which were most remote from worldly influence, and discovered the greatest love for primitive simplicity, would have been ever found adhering to the system of Prelacy with peculiar zeal. Instead of this, the more we examine the records of antiquity, the more we shall find precisely the reverse to be the fact. A circumstance which plainly evinces that ministerial

\* The reason given by the council for this decree is remarkable.— *Ne vilescat nomen Episcopi*. i. e. lest the title of Bishop should become too cheap,

parity was both the doctrine and practice of the Apostolic age ; and that Episcopacy, in the modern sense of the word, is the invention of man, and was introduced long afterwards.

*Fourthly ;* The decrees of some of the *early Councils*, concerning *Bishops*, clearly evince that such a change as we have supposed, really took place. It is impossible to look into the decrees of the numerous councils which were convened within the first five or six centuries, without perceiving constant provision made, on the one hand, for gradually extending the power of the Bishops ; and, on the other, for restraining the encroachments of those whose ambition had become inordinate and offensive. We find one Council decreeing, that Bishops should no longer be ordained for *country places* or *small towns* ; and that when the then incumbent Bishops of small and obscure places should happen to die, no successors should be appointed. We find another enacting a canon, that *Country-Bishops* should no longer be allowed to ordain ; and that *City-Presbyters* should not be thereafter permitted to ordain, *out of their own parishes*, without having the permission of the *City-Bishops*. And the reasons given for these and other restrictions, are, not the command of Christ ; not Apostolical example ; but that *the honor of the church might be preserved, and that the Episcopal dignity might be maintained*. The very existence of these decrees, proves that *Presbyters* had been before allowed to ordain ; and that *Bishops* were gradually undergoing a change



from the *parochial* to the *diocesan* character. In contrast with these and similar canons, it would be easy to produce others, for restraining the indecent attempts of some Bishops to enlarge their dioceses, and to encroach on the limits of their neighbours \*. If we had never heard of the fact before, these canons would suggest the suspicion, that Bishops were now, by little and little, extending their pastoral care from single congregations to extensive districts.

*Fifthly*: The gradual *diminution* of the *number of Bishops*, after the first three centuries, serves to confirm the fact for which I am contending. The *great number* of Bishops found in the early ages of the church, was remarked in a former letter. They appear to have been as numerous within two or three centuries of the Apostolic age, as modern *parish ministers*. But as we recede from that period, we find their *number* gradually diminishing, in exact proportion as their claims and honors became extended. In the island of *Creté*, where we are informed that in early times there were *one hundred* Bishops, in a few centuries afterwards we find but *twelve*. In a small district in *Asia*, where, in the third century, there were settled *one hundred and five* Bishops, in two or three centuries their number was reduced to *nine*. Numerous in-

\* For a more full account than it is possible to give in this manual, of these canons, and other proceedings of early Councils, concerning the powers of Bishops, see *Baxter's Treatise of Episcopacy*, London, 4to. 1681—and the learned *Clarkson's Primitive Episcopacy*. 8vo. 1688.

stances of the same kind might be produced, were it necessary or proper. And this diminution of the number of Bishops is the more remarkable, because, at the same time, the number of converts to Christianity, the extent of the church, and of course the call for ministerial labours, were daily increasing. What is the obvious inference from these facts? It is that primitive Bishops were a very different class of officers from those which bore that name three or four centuries afterwards; and consequently that, during this period, an important change had taken place in the character and powers of Bishops.

*Finally;* It is no small argument in favor of the truth of my position, that it is confirmed by the most learned and impartial historians, and other competent judges, of modern times.

The first writer whom I shall quote in proof of the fact which I am endeavouring to establish, is the learned Dr. *Mosheim*, a Lutheran divine, whose *Ecclesiastical History* has been for half a century, the theme of praise, for the general impartiality as well as erudition manifested by its author. In his account of the *first* century, he has the following remarks. “ The rulers of the  
 “ church at this time, were called either *Presbyters*  
 “ or *Bishops*, which two titles are, in the New-Testament, undoubtedly applied to the same order of  
 “ men. These were persons of eminent gravity,  
 “ and such as had distinguished themselves by their  
 “ superior sanctity and merit. Their particular

“ functions were not always the same ; for while  
“ some of them confined their labours to the in-  
“ struction of the people, others contributed in  
“ different ways to the edification of the church—  
“ Such was the constitution of the Christian church  
“ in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither  
“ numerous nor splendid. Three or four Presby-  
“ ters, men of remarkable piety and wisdom, ruled  
“ these small congregations in perfect harmony, nor  
“ did they stand in need of any president or supe-  
“ rior to maintain concord and order, where no  
“ dissensions were known. But the number of the  
“ Presbyters and Deacons increasing with that of  
“ the churches, and the sacred work of the ministry  
“ growing more painful and weighty by a number  
“ of additional duties, these new circumstances re-  
“ quired new regulations. It was then judged ne-  
“ cessary that one man of distinguished gravity and  
“ wisdom should preside in the council of Presby-  
“ ters, in order to distribute among his colleagues  
“ their several tasks, and to be a centre of union to  
“ the whole society. This person was at first styled  
“ the *Angel* of the church to which he belonged ;  
“ but was afterwards distinguished by the name of  
“ Bishop or Inspector ; a name borrowed from the  
“ Greek language, and expressing the principal  
“ part of the Episcopal function, which was to in-  
“ spect into, and superintend the affairs of the  
“ church. Let none, however, confound the Bish-  
“ ops of this primitive and golden period of the  
“ church with those of whom we read in the fol-

" lowing ages. For though they were both distin-  
 " guished by the same name, yet they differed ex-  
 " tremely, and that in many respects. A Bishop  
 " during the first and second century, was a person  
 " who had the care of one Christian assembly,  
 " which, at that time, was, generally speaking,  
 " small enough to be contained in a private house.  
 " In this assembly he acted, not so much with the  
 " authority of a *master*, as with the zeal and dili-  
 " gence of a faithful *servant*. He instructed the  
 " people, performed the several parts of divine  
 " worship, attended the sick, and inspected into the  
 " circumstances and supplies of the poor." *Eccles.*  
*Hist.* i. 101, 104—106. Such is the representa-  
 tion which this learned historian gives of the gov-  
 ernment of the Christian church during the *first*,  
 and the greater part of the *second* century.

Of the *third* century he speaks in the following  
 " manner. " The face of things began now to change  
 " in the Christian Church. The ancient method  
 " of ecclesiastical government, *seemed*, in general,  
 " still to subsist, while, at the same time, *by im-*  
 " *perceptible steps*, it varied from the primitive rule,  
 " and degenerated towards the form of a religious  
 " monarchy. For the Bishops aspired to higher  
 " degrees of power and authority than they had  
 " formerly possessed, and not only violated the  
 " rights of the *people*, but also made gradual en-  
 " croachments upon the privileges of the *Presby-*  
 " *ters*. And that they might cover these usurpa-  
 " tions with an air of justice, and an appearance of

“reason, they published *new doctrines* concerning  
“the *nature of the Church*, and of the *Episcopal*  
“*dignity*. One of the principal authors of this  
“*change* in the government of the church, was  
“*Cyprian*, who pleaded for the power of the Bish-  
“ops with more zeal and vehemence than had ever  
“been hitherto employed in that cause. This  
“change in the form of ecclesiastical government  
“was soon followed by a train of vices, which  
“dishonored the character and authority of those  
“to whom the administration of the church was  
“committed. For though several yet continued to  
“exhibit to the world illustrious examples of pri-  
“mitive piety and Christian virtue ; yet many were  
“sunk in luxury and voluptuousness ; puffed up  
“with vanity, arrogance, and ambition ; possessed  
“with a spirit of contention and discord ; and ad-  
“dicted to many other vices, that cast an unde-  
“served reproach upon the holy religion, of which  
“they were the unworthy professors and ministers.  
“This is testified in such an ample manner, by the  
“repeated complaints of many of the most re-  
“spectable writers of this age, that truth will not  
“permit us to spread the veil which we should  
“otherwise be desirous to cast over such enormi-  
“ties among an order so sacred. The Bishops  
“assumed, in many places, a princely authority.  
“They appropriated to their evangelical function,  
“the splendid ensigns of temporal majesty. A  
“throne, surrounded with ministers, exalted above  
“his *equals*, the servant of the meek and humble

“ Jesus; and sumptuous garments dazzled the  
 “ eyes and the minds of the multitude into an ig-  
 “ norant veneration for their arrogated authority.  
 “ The example of the *Bishops* was ambitiously imi-  
 “ tated by the *Presbyters*, who, neglecting the sa-  
 “ cred duties of their station, abandoned themselves  
 “ to the indolence and delicacy of an effeminate  
 “ and luxurious life. The Deacons, beholding the  
 “ Presbyters deserting thus their functions, boldly  
 “ usurped their rights and privileges; and the ef-  
 “ fects of a corrupt ambition were spread through  
 “ every rank of the sacred order.” I. 265—267.

I shall only add a short extract from the same writ-  
 ter's account of the *fourth* century. “ The Bishops,  
 “ whose opulence and authority were considerably  
 “ increased since the reign of *Constantine*, began to  
 “ introduce gradually innovations into the form of  
 “ ecclesiastical discipline, and to change the an-  
 “ cient government of the church. Their first  
 “ step was an entire exclusion of the *people* from all  
 “ part in the administration of ecclesiastical af-  
 “ fairs; and afterwards, they, by degrees, divested  
 “ even the *Presbyters* of their ancient privileges,  
 “ and their primitive authority, that they might  
 “ have no importunate protesters to control their  
 “ ambition, or oppose their proceedings; and prin-  
 “ cipally that they might either engross to them-  
 “ selves, or distribute as they thought proper, the  
 “ possessions and revenues of the church. Hence  
 “ it came to pass that at the conclusion of the *fourth*  
 “ century, there remained no more than a mere

“ shadow of the ancient government of the church.  
“ Many of the privileges which had formerly be-  
“ longed to the Presbyters and people, were usurp-  
“ ed by the Bishops; and many of the rights  
“ which had been formerly vested in the Universal  
“ Church, were transferred to the emperors; and  
“ to subordinate officers and magistrates.” I. 348.

Such is the representation of *Mosheim*, one of the most learned men of the eighteenth century; and who had probably investigated the early history of the church with as much diligence and penetration as any man that ever lived.

The next citation shall be taken, from *Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The hostility of this writer to the Christian religion is well known. Of course, on any subject involving the Divine origin of Christianity, I should feel little disposition either to respect his judgment, or to rely on his assertions. But on the subject before us, which is a question of *fact*, and which he treats historically, he had no temptation to deviate from impartiality; or, if such temptation had existed, it would have been likely to draw him to the side of ecclesiastical aristocracy and splendor, rather than to that of primitive simplicity. His deep and extensive learning, no competent judge ever questioned: and, indeed, his representations on this subject, are fortified by so many references to the most approved writers, that they cannot be considered as resting on his candor or veracity alone\*.

\* The pious episcopal divine, Dr. *Haweis*, speaking of

Mr. *Gibbon* thus describes the character and duties of Christian Bishops in the first and second centuries : “ The public functions of religion were “ solely entrusted to the established ministers of the “ church, the *Bishops* and the *Presbyters* ; two appellations which in their first origin, appear to “ have distinguished the *same office*, and the *same order* of persons. The name of *Presbyter* was “ expressive of their age, or rather of their gravity “ and wisdom. The title of *Bishop* denoted their “ inspection over the faith and manners of the “ Christians who were committed to their pastoral “ care. In proportion to the respective numbers of “ the faithful, a larger or smaller number of these “ *Episcopal Presbyters* guided each infant congregation, with equal authority, and with united “ counsels. But the most perfect equality of freedom requires the directing hand of a superior “ magistrate ; and the order of public deliberations “ soon introduces the office of a President, invested “ at least with the authority of collecting the sentiments, and of executing the resolutions of the as-

Mr. *Gibbon's* mode of representing this subject, expresses himself in the following manner. “ Where no immediate bias “ to distort the truth, leaves him an impartial witness, I will “ quote *Gibbon* with pleasure. I am conscious his authority “ is more likely to weigh with the world in general, than “ mine. I will therefore, simply report his account of the “ government and nature of the primitive church. I think “ we shall not in this point greatly differ.” *Eccles. Hist.* I. 416.



“ ssembly. A regard for the public tranquillity,  
“ which would so frequently have been interrupted  
“ by annual, or by occasional elections, induced the  
“ primitive Christians to constitute an honorable  
“ and perpetual magistracy, and to choose one of  
“ the wisest and most holy among their Presbyters,  
“ to execute, during his life, the duties of their ec-  
“ clesiastical governor. It was under these cir-  
“ cumstances that the lofty title of *Bishop* began to  
“ raise itself above the humble appellation of *Pres-*  
“ *byter*; and while the latter remained the most  
“ natural distinction for the members of every  
“ Christian senate, the former was appropriated to  
“ the dignity of its new President. The pious and  
“ humble Presbyters who were first dignified with  
“ the Episcopal title, could not possess, and would  
“ probably have rejected the power and pomp which  
“ now encircle the tiara of the Roman Pontiff, or  
“ the mitre of a German Prelate. The primitive  
“ Bishops were considered only as the *first* of their  
“ equals, and the honorable servants of a free peo-  
“ ple. Whenever the episcopal chair became va-  
“ cant by death, a new President was chosen  
“ among the Presbyters, by the suffrage of the  
“ whole congregation. Such was the mild and equal  
“ constitution by which the Christians were govern-  
“ ed more than an hundred years after the death of  
“ the Apostles\*.” *Decline and Fall*. Vol. II. 272  
—275.

\* Here is an explicit declaration, that the *presidency* or standing *moderatorship* of one of the Presbyters, among his

Concerning the state of Episcopacy in the *third* century, Mr. Gibbon thus speaks. “As the legislative authority of the particular churches, was “insensibly superseded by the use of *Councils*, the “*Bishops* obtained by their alliance, a much larger “share of executive and arbitrary power; and, as “soon as they were connected by a sense of their “common interest, they were enabled to attack “with united vigour the original rights of the clergy and people. The prelates of the third century “imperceptibly changed the language of *exhortation* into that of *command*, scattered the seeds of “future usurpations, and supplied by scripture allegories, and declamatory rhetoric, their deficiency “of force and of reason. They exalted the unity “and power of the church, as it was represented in “the *Episcopal office*, of which every Bishop enjoyed an equal and undivided portion. Princes and “magistrates, it was often repeated, might boast “an earthly claim to a transitory dominion. It was “the Episcopal authority alone, which was derived “from the Deity, and extended itself over this, and “over another world. The Bishops were the “vicegerents of Christ, the successors of the Apostles, and the mystic substitutes of the High-priest “of the Mosaic law. Their exclusive privilege “of conferring the sacerdotal character, *invaded the “freedom* both of clerical and of popular elections; “colleagues, without any claim to *superiority of order*, was the only kind of Episcopacy that existed in the church until near the close of the *second* century.

“ and if, in the administration of the church, they  
“ sometimes consulted the judgment of the Presby-  
“ ters, or the inclination of the people, they most  
“ carefully inculcated the merit of such a voluntary  
“ condescension.” I. p. 276, 277.

Dr. *Haweis*, an Episcopal divine, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, a late and popular work before quoted, substantially agrees with Dr. *Moshelm*, and Mr. *Gibbon*, in their representations on this subject. He explicitly pronounces with them, that primitive Episcopacy was *parochial*, and not *diocesan*; that clerical pride and ambition gradually introduced prelacy; that there was no material innovation, however, on the primitive model, until the middle of the second century; and that after this, the system of imparity made rapid progress, until there arose, in succession, *Diocesan Bishops*, *Archbishops*, *Metropolitans*, *Patriarchs*, and, finally, the *Pope* himself.

The great body of ecclesiastical historians give, in substance, the same account. There is indeed, some difference of opinion among them concerning the *times* at which the various steps in the rise and progress of prelacy were taken, and concerning the *means* which ambitious ecclesiastics employed in making their successive encroachments; but I know of no Protestant historian who has the character of even tolerable impartiality, who does not represent prelacy as a human invention, which was brought in some time after the Apostle's days, and which arose gradually and almost insensibly from

small beginnings, until it terminated in the grand and triumphant usurpation of the Bishop of *Rome*. Hence professor *Whitaker*, an Episcopal divine of great learning, and of high authority, speaking of the conceded fact, that prelacy was introduced after the Apostolic age, and as a remedy against schism, frankly declares, that "the remedy was al-  
" most worse than the disease ; for as at first one  
" *Presbyter* was set over the rest, and made *Bishop*,  
" so afterwards one *Bishop* was set over the other  
" *Bishops*. Thus that custom begot the *Pope* and  
" his monarchy, and brought them by little and lit-  
" tle into the church." *Regim. Eccles.* p. 540.

The *fact* being thus established, that diocesan Episcopacy was not sanctioned by the Apostles ; that it was the offspring of human ambition ; and that it was *gradually* introduced into the church ; I shall not detain you long in considering the precise *gradations* by which it was introduced, or the precise *date* to be assigned to each step in its progress. Such an inquiry is as *unnecessary* and *unimportant* as it is *difficult*. But as it may gratify some readers to know how those who have most deeply and successfully explored antiquity, have considered the subject, I shall attempt a sketch of what appears to have been the rise and progress of this remarkable usurpation.

The Christian religion spread itself during the Apostolic age, over a large part of the Roman empire. It was first received in the principal cities,

*Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome.* Here congregations appear to have been first formed, and church officers first appointed. As the places of worship were usually private houses, it follows of course that each congregation was comparatively small. And as we read of *great multitudes* having believed in several of the larger cities, we may infer that there were *a number* of these congregations, or small *house-churches* in each of those cities.

Each primitive congregation was furnished with one or more *Elders*, and also with *Deacons*. The *Elders* were of two kinds: the first class were ministers of the Gospel, and therefore *taught* and led the devotions of the people, as well as *ruled* in the church. The other class assisted as *rulers* only. It is not certain that *both* these classes of Elders were found in *every* church. We only know that they both existed in the Apostolic age; and that all the Elders of each congregation, when convened, formed a kind of parochial *Presbytery*, or church *Session*. The *teaching Elders* were also called *Bishops*. Of these each congregation was always furnished with *one*, and sometimes with *several*, according to the number of its members, and other circumstances. We are expressly told in the sacred history, that in the days of the Apostles there were *a number* of *Bishops* in each of the cities of *Ephesus* and *Philippi*; and it is most probable that these were the pastors of different congregations in those cities respectively.

In these cases in which there were several *Pastors* or *Bishops* in the same church, they were at first perfectly, and in all respects equal. "They ruled the church," as *Jerome* expresses it, "in common;" and the alternate titles of *Bishop* and *Elder* belonged and were equally applied to all. It does not appear, that in the beginning, even a temporary *Chairman* was found necessary. There was probably little formality in their mode of transacting business. A large portion of the spirit of their Master supplied the place of specific rules, and of energetic government. But towards the close of the first century, when both churches and ministers had greatly multiplied; when it was common to have a number of *teaching* as well as *ruling* elders in the same congregation; when with the increasing number, it is most probable that some unworthy characters had crept into the ministry; and when, of course, the preservation of order in their parochial *Presbyteries* was more difficult, the expedient of appointing a *President* or *Moderator*, would naturally and almost unavoidably be adopted. This presiding *Presbyter* was generally, at first, the oldest and gravest of the number; but soon afterwards, as we are told, the rule of *seniority* was laid aside, and the most able, enterprising, and decisive *Presbyter*, was chosen to fill the chair. After a while, the choice of a *President* was not made at every meeting of the *parochial Presbytery*, or *Church Session*, but was made for an indefinite time, and often *for life*; in which case the choice usually fell

upon the person who had the most influence, and was supposed to possess the greatest weight of character. This Chairman or *Moderator*, who presided during the debates, collected the voices, and pronounced the sentences of the bench of Presbyters, was, of course, the most conspicuous and dignified of the number. He had no pre-eminence of *order* over his brethren; but (to employ the illustration of a respectable Episcopal divine, before quoted,) as the chairman of a committee has a more honorable place than the rest of the members, while the committee is sitting; so a chairman for life, in a dignified ecclesiastical court, was generally regarded with peculiar respect and veneration. In conducting public worship, this chairman always took the lead; as the organ of the body, he called the other Presbyters to the performance of the several parts assigned to them; and usually himself prayed and preached. When the bench of Presbyters was called to perform an *ordination*, the chairman, of course, presided in this transaction; and in general, in all acts of the Church-session or Consistory, he took the lead, and was the principal medium of communication.

This practice of choosing a President in the consistorial courts appears to have begun in a short time after the death of the Apostles, and to have been the only kind of pre-eminence that was enjoyed by any of the Bishops, over their brethren, until about the middle, and, in some churches, till the close of the *second* century. Indeed *Jerom* de

clares, that this was the only kind of Episcopal pre-eminence that existed in the church of *Alexandria*; one of the most conspicuous then in the world, until the middle of the *third* century. That such was the *only* superiority which the principal pastor of each church enjoyed in primitive times, and that such was the *origin* of this superiority, is evident, not only from the direct testimony of antiquity, but also, indirectly, from the *names* by which this officer is generally distinguished by the early writers. He is not only called emphatically, *the Bishop* of the church; but, as all his colleagues also had the title of *Bishop*, he is, perhaps, more frequently styled, by way of distinction, the *President*, (*Προσβύτης*); the *Chairman*, (*Προεδρός*); and the person who filled the *first seat*, (*Πρωτοκαθίδριμα*), in the Presbytery. Had we no other evidence in the case, these titles alone would go far towards establishing the origin and nature of his pre-eminence.

The powers of this Chairman were gradually increased. In some cases his own ambition, and, in others, the exigencies of particular times and places, at once multiplied his duties, enlarged his authority, and augmented his honors. Not only the *ruling Elders*, but also his colleagues in the ministry were led insensibly to look upon him with peculiar reverence. His presence began to be deemed *necessary*, at first to the *regularity*, and afterwards to the *validity* of all the proceedings of the bench of Presbyters. And as his office, in those times, was a post of *danger*, as well as of *honor*, the rest of the Presby-



ters would more readily submit to the claims of a man who put his life in his hand to serve the church. This may be called the **FIRST STEP** in the rise of Prelacy. The example once set in some of the principal cities, was probably soon adopted in the less populous towns, and in the country churches.

This measure led to another equally natural. The Pastors or Bishops who resided in the same city, were led on different occasions to meet together, to consult and to transact various kinds of business. Their meetings were probably at first, attended with very little formality. In a short time, however, as Christianity gained ground, they came together more frequently; had more business to transact; and found it expedient to be more formal in their proceedings. A *President* or *Chairman* became necessary, as in the smaller Presbytery, or Church Session. Such an officer was accordingly chosen, sometimes at each meeting, but more frequently for an indefinite period, or for life. Whatever number of congregations and of ministers were thus united under a Presbytery, they were styled, (upon a principle of ecclesiastical unity which was then common,) one church. The standing *Moderator* or *President* of this larger Presbytery, was styled *the Bishop* of the city in which he presided. This was a **SECOND STEP** towards prelacy. At what precise time it was taken, is difficult to be ascertained. But before the close of the second century, so greatly increased were

the affluence and pride of ecclesiastics, that the *President* or *Moderator* of these meetings was seated on a lofty *throne* in the midst of the assembly, decorated with splendid *robes*, and loaded with peculiar honors. As he officially superintended the execution of the decrees of the assembly, his power gradually increased; and it was a short transition from the exercise of power in the name of others, to the exercise of it without consulting them.

In the towns where there was but one congregation, and that a small one, there was generally but one *teaching* *Presbyter* associated with a number of *ruling* *Presbyters*. This was the *Pastor* or *Bishop*. When the congregation increased, and the introduction of other teachers was found necessary, the first retained his place as sole *Pastor*, and the others came in as his *assistants*; and although of the same *order* with himself, yet he alone was the responsible *Pastor*. In short, the rest of the *teaching Presbyters* in this case, bore precisely the same relation to the *Bishop*, on the score of rank, as *Currates* bear to the *Rector* in a large Episcopal congregation. They were clothed with the same official power of preaching and administering ordinances with the *Pastor*, and were capable, without any further ordination, of becoming *Pastors* in their turn; but while they remained in this situation, their labours were directed by him. As a congregation under these circumstances increased still more, and included a number of members from the neighbouring villages, some of these mem-

bers, finding it inconvenient to attend the church in which the *Bishop* officiated every Lord's day, began to lay plans for forming separate congregations nearer home. To this the Bishop consented, on condition that the little worshipping societies thus formed, should consider themselves as still under his pastoral care, as amenable to the parent church, and as bound to obey him as their spiritual guide. When the *Pastor* agreed to this arrangement, it was generally understood, that there should be but one *Communion table*, and one *Baptistery* in the parish; and, of course, that when the members of these neighbouring societies wished to enjoy either of the sealing ordinances, they were to attend at the parent church, and receive them from the hands of the *Pastor* or *Bishop* himself. At ordinary seasons they were supplied by his *Curates* or *Assistants*, who, in labouring in these little *Oratories* or *Chapels of Ease*, were subject to his control. This was laying a foundation for the authority of one Bishop or Pastor over several congregations, which was not long afterwards claimed and generally yielded. This proved a THIRD STEP in the rise of Prelacy.

The progress of the church towards prelacy was further aided by the practice of convening *Synods* and *Councils*. This practice began at an early period, and soon became general. The *Latins* styled these larger meetings of the clergy, *Councils*, the *Greeks*, *Synods*; and the laws which were enacted by these bodies, were denominated *Canons*, i. e. *Rules* "These Councils," says Dr. *Mosheim*,

“changed the whole face of the church, and “gave it a new form.” The order and decorum of their business required that a *President* should be appointed. The power lodged in this officer scarcely ever failed to be extended and abused. These *Synods* were accustomed to meet in the capital cities of the district or province to which the members belonged, and to confer the presidency upon the most conspicuous Pastor, for the time being, of the city in which they met. And thus, by the gradual operation of habit, it came to be considered as the right of those persons, and of their successors in office. “Hence,” says the learned historian just quoted, “the rights of *Metropolitans* derive their origin.” The order of the church required, at first, the presence of the presiding Bishops, to give *regularity* to the acts of *Synods* and *Councils*. In a little while their presence was deemed necessary to the *validity* of these acts; and, in the *third* century, it began to be believed that without them nothing could be done. Such is the ordinary progress of human affairs. The increase of wealth, the decay of piety, the corruption of morals, and the prevalence of heresy and contention, were all circumstances highly favorable to the progress of this change, and concurring with Jewish prejudices, pagan habits, and clerical ambition, hurried on the growing usurpation.

That the Synods and Councils which early began to be convened, were, *in fact*, thus employed

by the ambitious clergy, to extend and confirm their power, might be proved by witnesses almost numberless. The testimony of one shall suffice. It is that of the great and good Bishop, *Gregory Nazianzen*, who lived in the fourth century, and who, on being summoned by the Emperor to the general Council of *Constantinople*, which met in 381, addressed a letter to *Procopius*, to excuse himself from attending. In this letter he declares, "that he was desirous of avoiding all Synods, because he had never seen a good effect, or happy conclusion of any one of them; that they rather increased than lessened the evils they were designed to prevent; and that the love of contention, and the *lust of power*, were there manifested in instances innumerable." *Greg. Naz. Oper.* tom. I. p. 814. Epist. 55. And, afterwards, speaking of that very Council, this pious Father remarks:— "These conveyers of the Holy Ghost, these preachers of peace to all men, grew bitterly outrageous and clamorous against one another, in the midst of the church, mutually accusing each other, leaping about as if they had been mad, under the furious impulse of a lust of power and dominion, as if they would have rent the whole world in pieces." He afterwards adds, "this was not the effect of piety, but of a *contention for thrones*." Tom. II. 25, 27. In short, so great was the disgust of *Gregory* at the ambitious and grasping spirit manifested by the clergy of his day, that we find him speaking on the subject in the fol-

lowing warm language. "Would to God there were *no prelacy*, no pre-eminence of place, no tyrannical privileges; and that we might be distinguished by virtue alone. This right and left hand, and this middle place, these higher and lower dignities, and this state-like precedency, have caused many fruitless contests and bruises, have cast many into the pit, and carried away multitudes to the place of the goats." *Oper.* tom. I. *Orat.* 28. Would an eminently learned and pious Bishop have spoken thus, if he had considered prelacy as of Divine appointment? Or would he have suffered himself to use this language concerning the prelates of his day, and also concerning their predecessors\*, if their ambition and usurpations had not been altogether intolerable?

In the *third* century, the title of *Bishop* was seldom applied to any other of the Presbyters, than the different classes of *Presidents* before mentioned. The only shadow which now remained of its former use was in the case of the pastors of *country parishes*, who still maintained the parochial Episcopacy, under the name of *Chorepiscopi*. The ordaining power, originally vested in all Presbyters alike, was in the third century seldom exercised by Presbyters, unless the presiding Presbyter, or Bishop, was present. About this time, the name of *Presbyter* was changed into that of *Priest*, in conse-

\* He speaks with nearly equal severity of the unprincipled ambition, and shameful conduct of the clergy at the Council of *Nice*, which met in 325.

quence of the unscriptural and irrational doctrine coming into vogue, that the Christian ministry was modelled after the *Jewish priesthood*. About this time also the office of *Ruling Elder* appears to have been laid aside; and a part of the ministry of the word bestowed upon *Deacons*, contrary to the original design of their office, which was to superintend the maintenance of the poor. The *Presbytery* sunk into the Bishop's council. The *Synod* subserved the pretensions of the Metropolitan; and there was only wanting a *General Council*, and a *Chief Bishop*, to complete the hierarchy. Both of these the next age compliantly furnished. In the mean time, the few humble admirers of primitive parity and simplicity, who dared to remonstrate against these usurpations, were reviled as promoters of faction and schism, and either thrust out of the church, or awed into silence.

When *Constantine* came to the imperial throne, in the *fourth* century, he confirmed the usurpation of the Bishops by his authority, and bestowed upon them a degree of wealth and power to which they had before been strangers. He conferred new splendor on every part of the ecclesiastical system. He fostered every thing which had a tendency to convert religion from a spiritual service into a gaudy, ostentatious, dazzling ritual; and its ministers into *lords over God's heritage*, instead of *examples to the flock*. Old Testament rites, heathen ceremonies, and institutions of worldly policy, which had long before begun to enter the church, now

rushed in like a flood. And what was worse, the great mass of the people, as well as of the clergy, were gratified with the change. The Jewish proselyte was pleased to see the resemblance which the economy of the Christian church began to bear to the ancient Temple-service. The Pagan convert was daily more reconciled to a system, which he saw approximating to that which he had been long accustomed to behold in the house of his idols. And the artful Politician could not but admire a hierarchy, so far subservient to the interests, and conformed to the model of the Roman Empire. *Constantine* assumed to himself the right of calling general Councils, of presiding in them, of determining controversies, and of fixing the bounds of ecclesiastical provinces. He formed the Prelatical government after the imperial model, into great prefectures; in which arrangement, a certain pre-eminence was conferred on the Bishops of *Rome*, *Antioch*, *Alexandria*, and *Constantinople*; the *first rank* being always reserved for the Bishop of *Rome*, who succeeded in gradually extending his usurpation, until he was finally confirmed in it by an imperial decree.

Though an attempt has been made to trace some of the gradations by which ministerial imparity arose from small beginnings to a settled diocesan Episcopacy; yet, from the very nature of the case, the *dates* of the several steps cannot be *precisely* ascertained. To definite transactions which take place in a single day, or year, or which are accomplished in a few years, it is commonly an easy



task to assign dates. But, in this *gradual* change, which was more than *three centuries* in accomplishing, no reasonable man could expect to find the limits of the several steps precisely defined; because each step was slowly and almost insensibly taken; and more especially, because the practice of all the churches was not *uniform*. There was no *particular time* when the transition from a state of *perfect parity*, to a fixed and acknowledged *superiority of order* took place *at once*, and therefore no such time can be assigned. It is evident from the records of antiquity that the titles of *Bishop* and *Presbyter* were indiscriminately applied to the same order in some churches, long after a distinction had begun to arise in others. It is equally evident, that the *ordaining* power of Presbyters was longer retained in the more pure and primitive districts of the church, than where wealth, ambition, and a worldly spirit, bore greater sway. In some churches there were *several Bishops* at the same time; in others, but *one*. In some parts of the Christian world, it was the practice to consider and treat all the preaching Presbyters in each church as *colleagues* and *equals*; in others, one of the Presbyters was regarded as the *Pastor* or *Bishop*, and the rest his *assistants*. A few early writers mention *Ruling-Elders*, but the greater part say nothing about them; simply because this class of officers was not found in every congregation, and was early discontinued. Further; when the practice of choosing one of the

Presbyters to be *President* or *Moderator*, commenced, it appeared in different forms in different churches. In one church, at least, according to *Jerome*, the presiding Presbyter was *elected* by his colleagues; in other churches, according to *Hilary*, the President came to the chair agreeably to a settled principle of *rotation*. In some cases the presiding Presbyter was vested with greater dignity and authority; in others with less. In short, it is evident, that, in some portions of the church, a difference of *order* between *Bishops* and *Presbyters* was recognized in the *third* century; in others, and perhaps generally, in the *fourth*; but in some others, not until the *fifth* century. We learn from the most authentic records, that *Patrick* established *three hundred and sixty-five Bishops* over the *same number* of congregations, which he formed in *Ireland*, in the fifth century; while *Theodoret*, a Bishop in *Asia*, and contemporary with *Patrick*, declares, that he had *eight hundred* congregations under his care! No wonder, then, that we find a different *language* used by different Fathers on this subject, for the *practice* was different; and this fact directs us to the only rational and adequate method of interpreting their different representations.

Such being the case, what reasonable man would expect to find in the records of antiquity, any definite or satisfactory account of the rise and progress of prelacy? If changes equally early and important are covered with still greater darkness; if the history of the first general Council that ever met,

and which agitated to its centre the whole Christian church, is so obscure that even the place of its meeting is disputed, and no distinct record of its acts has ever reached our times;—what might be expected concerning an ecclesiastical innovation, so remote in its origin, so gradual in its progress, so indefinitely diversified in the shapes in which it appeared in different places at the same time, and so unsusceptible of precise and lucid exhibition? To this question, no discerning and candid mind will be at a loss for an answer. No; the whole of that reasoning, which confidently deduces the Apostolical origin of Prelacy, from its acknowledged and general, but by no means universal, prevalence in the fourth century, is mere empty declamation, as contradictory to every principle of human nature, as it is to the whole current of early history.

## LETTER IX.

*Practical Influence of Prelacy—Uninterrupted Succession—Recapitulation—Concluding Remarks.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

THE *practical influence* of any doctrine, has been generally considered as a good test of its truth. *By their fruits ye shall know them*, is a rule which applies to principles as well as to men. Let us apply this rule to the case before us. If Prelacy be of exclusive and unalterable Divine right: If it be so essential, that there is no true church, no authorized ministry, no valid ordinances without it: If Episcopal churches *alone* are in covenant with Christ, in the appointed road to heaven, and warranted to hope in the promises of God; then we may reasonably expect and demand that all churches of this denomination, should display more of the spirit of Christ than any other classes of professing Christians. The blessing of God, is, beyond all question, most likely to attend those institutions which are most agreeable to his will. But we may go further. All who believe the Bible will ac-

knowledge that there is *more* religion in the church, than *out* of it; *more* of the image and love of the Redeemer among his covenanted people, than among those who are *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise*. To deny this, would be to call in question every promise which the King of Zion has made to his people, and every advantage of union with him as their head. Now if all non-episcopal societies are to be considered as mere uncommanded associations, which have nothing to do with the church of Christ; and, if union with that church is a privilege which belongs to Episcopalians alone; then those who believe this doctrine, are bound, on every Christian principle, to show, that Episcopal churches contain within their bosom more pure and undefiled religion, more harmony, more love for the truth as it is in Jesus, more universal holiness of heart and of life, than any, or than all other religious denominations. But is this in fact the case? Will the friends of Prelacy undertake to show, that they *alone* give this evidence that they belong to Christ? Will they even undertake to show, that Episcopalians exhibit in a *pre-eminent degree*, this practical testimony, that they are the *chosen generation, the peculiar people, who are purified by the blood, and quickened by the Spirit of the Redeemer?*

The efficacy of Episcopal government in securing the unity of the church, in guarding against schism, and in promoting harmony and peace, has been

much celebrated. But is there such a peculiar and benign efficacy in that form of ecclesiastical order? I am willing to refer the decision of this question to any man who is acquainted with ecclesiastical history. If we consult *Eusebius*, he will present us with a picture of the violence, the strife, and the divisions among *Bishops*, and among different portions of the church, through their means, which is enough to make a Christian weep. If we consult *Gregory Nazianzen*, he will tell us, in language before quoted, that Prelacy "has caused many fruitless conflicts and bruises, has cast many into the pit, and carried away multitudes to the place of the goats." If we examine the history of any Episcopal church on earth, we shall find it exhibiting, to say the least, as large a share of heresy, contention, and schism, as any which bears the Presbyterian form; and, what is more, we shall ever find the Prelates themselves quite as forward as any others, in scenes of violence and outrage. The Episcopal professor *Whitaker*, had no high opinion of the benign effects of Prelacy, when he declared, that if this form of government were introduced as a remedy against schism, "the remedy was worse than the disease." "The first express attempt," says the learned *Dr. Owen*, "to corrupt and divide a church, made from within itself, was that in the church of *Jerusalem*, made by *Thebulis*, because *Simon Cleopas* was chosen *Bishop*, and he was refused. The same rise had the schisms of the *Novatians* and *Donatists*, the heresies of *Arius* and others." In short, the animosities and divisions

in the church of Christ, which have taken their rise from the contending interests, the lawless ambition, and the indecent strife of diocesan *Bishops*, are so numerous, that history is full of them ; and so disgusting to every mind imbued with the spirit of Christianity, that it would give pain even to an opponent to dwell upon the subject. But further ; do we not all know Episcopal churches, at the present day, in which all varieties of theological creeds are received, from the purest orthodoxy, down to the most blasphemous heresies, and that by all ranks of their clergy, as well as their lay members. Is this that *unity of the spirit* of which the Scriptures speak ? Is this that *unity* which constitutes men, *one body in Christ*, and which will prepare them for the more sublime and perfect union of the church triumphant above ?

Again ; if the Episcopal church *alone* is in communion with Christ ; if she possesses the only authorized ministry, and the only valid ordinances ; then we have a right to expect that she will pre-eminently display the purifying effects of these peculiar privileges. For if the Christian ministry and ordinances were given to *edify the body of Christ*, and are the great instruments which God does, *in fact*, employ for this purpose, as both Presbyterians and Episcopalians concur in believing ; then we must suppose that *more*, much more, of their sacred influence will appear among those who possess these precious gifts, than among those who possess them not. To suppose that an *invalid* ministry and or-

dinances will be, *in general*, as useful in their effects, as those which are *valid*, is to surrender one of the most important distinctions between truth and error.

Do we, then, actually find in Episcopal churches more real and vital religion, than in other churches? Do we actually find among them more of the image of Christ; more attachment to evangelical truth; more faithful preaching of *Jesus Christ, and him crucified*; more brotherly love; more pure and holy living; more care to avoid a sinful conformity to the world; more vigorous and scriptural discipline; more zeal for the Divine glory; and a temper and conversation more suited to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, than in the mass of non-episcopal churches? In short, are Episcopalians, *as a denomination*, more serious, devout, self-denied, benevolent, meek, forgiving, and heavenly-minded, than Presbyterians, *as a denomination*? Perhaps it will be said, that much of what *we* call *vital religion*, is rather *superstition*; and that with respect to *true* and *rational* piety, there is full as much, if not more, in Episcopal than in other churches. On this question I will not dwell long. By *real religion*, I mean a conformity of temper and practice with that system of evangelical truth which is exhibited in the writings, and which adorned the lives of Bishop *Jewel*, Bishop *Hall*, Bishop *Davenant*, Archbishop *Usher*, and many other illustrious Prelates of the church of *England*, of former ages; that system which has been since defended and ex-



emplified by the *Herveys*, the *Romaines*, the *Newtons*, the *Scotts*, and a multitude more of unmitred Divines of the same church, in later times; that evangelical system which is embodied in the Articles of that church, and which breathes in the greatest part of her Liturgy and Offices; that system which exalts the Divine Redeemer to the throne, which places the penitent sinner in the dust, at his footstool, which teaches men to rely solely on the atoning sacrifice and perfect righteousness of the Saviour, for pardon and life, and which at the same time, prompts them to *follow holiness*, and to be *zealous of good works*. Is there more of *this* kind of religion in Episcopal churches than in any others? I cannot suppose that there is a single Episcopalian in our country, either so ill informed, or so prejudiced, as to believe, for a moment, that his own church is in the least degree superior, in any of these respects, to her Presbyterian neighbours.

But, perhaps, this reasoning will be objected to by our Episcopal brethren. They will tell us that there is often a wide difference between entertaining correct opinions, and pursuing a suitable practice; that men may and do *hold the truth in unrighteousness*; and, that the same reasoning, if admitted, would prove that no form of religion is true, because in *every* church we may find many lukewarm and immoral professors. This objection, however, is nothing to the purpose. It is merely an evasion of the argument. We all daily make and

allow the distinction between *principles*, and the *conduct* of those who profess them. The former are often *excellent*, while the latter is *base*. We protest, and with the strongest reason, against the conclusion, that religion is false, because some men who profess to believe it are immoral; or that a particular church is not a true church of Christ, because many of her members act in a manner unworthy of their profession.] But our reasoning and conclusion, in this case, are wholly of a different kind. We only contend, that the ministry and the ordinances of religion, which claim to be *exclusively valid*, ought to prove themselves *more efficacious* than those which are *destitute of validity*. We contend that there is, and must ever be, *more virtue and holiness in the church of Christ, than out of it*. We contend, in short, that in that *household of God*, to which his gracious promises, and his life-giving Spirit are vouchsafed, while we shall always find much corruption, we must expect to find, *in general*, much *more* of the life and power of religion; *more fervent piety, more zeal for the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and more righteousness of life, than among those who have no connexion with that household*. If not, wherein is the greater advantage of being in the church, than in the world? Nor do we, by taking this ground, furnish either an infidel or an heretic with a handle against us. An enemy of the Gospel may come into all of our churches, and point to some, perhaps to many of our members, who do not by any means *walk wor-*

*thy of the vocation wherewith they are called.* Would he have a right from this fact, to infer the falsity of our system of faith? No; the obvious distinction between *principles* and the *conduct* of those who profess them, would, if he were a candid man, prevent him from drawing this inference. But if an infidel could come into our solemn assemblies, even the purest of them, and not only *assert*, but *prove*, that there is *no more* either of strict morality or fervent piety, among the *professors* of religion, than among its *despisers*; if he could do this, then indeed he might, and ought, to triumph over us. As long as he could only with truth say, "Some of you Christians are as bad as infidels;" I would confidently reply, "They are not Christians, but *hy-pocrites*; for, if they had any portion of the spirit of their Master, they would not act thus." But if he could really make it appear that Christians are *in general*, and *as a body*, in no respect better than infidels, he would certainly establish his argument. This, however, blessed be God! the infidel cannot do; and the very circumstance of the enemies of Christianity marking with such eager triumph, every case of unworthy conduct in the professors of religion, shows that, in their opinion, Christian principles *require* more holiness than infidel principles require, and are *expected to produce* more. The same reasoning we adopt with our Episcopal brethren. We do not ask them to produce *perfection* in their church; we do not ask them to show, that *all* their members act conformably with

their principles; but we insist upon their showing that there is, *in general*, a much *larger portion* of fervent piety, and of strict morality, in their church, than in any of the non-episcopal churches; and until they do this, every unprejudiced man will consider their claim of being alone "in covenant with Christ," as unreasonable as it is unscriptural.

It does not affect the solidity of this argument, that some churches which Presbyterians consider as not *regularly* organized, upon *scriptural* principles, nevertheless embrace in their bosom a large portion of unaffected piety. If we undertook to maintain that the Presbyterian church is the only real church on earth, and alone in covenant with Christ the Head, such a fact would, indeed, present a difficulty of no easy solution. But we make no such arrogant claim. Wherever the unfeigned love of our Divine Saviour, an humble reliance on his atoning sacrifice, and a corresponding holiness of life, pervade any denomination of Christians, we hail them as brethren in Christ; we acknowledge them to be a true church; and although we may observe and lament imperfections in their outward government, we consider them as truly in covenant with the King of Zion, as ourselves. All this is perfectly consistent with believing, as we do, that *Presbyterian* church government was the *primitive* model, and that it is the *duty* of every church to conform to this model. It is certainly the *duty* of every man to keep the whole law of God; yet as we do not deny that an individual professor is a real

Christian, because we perceive some imperfections in his character ; so neither do we deny a church to be a true church of Christ, because she is not *in all respects* conformed to our ideas of scriptural purity. We consider our Episcopal brethren as having wandered far from the simplicity of Apostolic order. But what then ? Must we arrogantly *un-church* them on that account ? By no means. We lament their deviation ; but notwithstanding this, can freely embrace them as members of the Church universal ; and were there no other church with which we could commune, should feel no scruple in holding communion with them as brethren.

Those who contend for the Divine right of diocesan Episcopacy, and for the doctrine of Uninterrupted Succession, in its most rigid form, often ask us, How we deduce our succession in the ministry ? They profess to be able to trace their own line of ecclesiastical descent, with the utmost ease ; and gravely present us with long catalogues of Bishops, from the Apostles down to the present day. Having done this, they demand from us similar catalogues, and a similar deduction. I shall not attempt at present to discuss the questions, Whether such succession is *essential* to the Christian ministry ; and, Whether, supposing it to be so, it can be distinctly *traced* through the medium of regular historical documents, from the Apostolic age to the present. On both these questions the most learned and pious Episcopal Divines have been divided in

opinion. *Chillingworth, Barrow, Bishop Hoadley,* and a number more, have taken the negative side ; pronouncing the claim of succession to be as futile as it is unnecessary ; and assailing it with the most pointed ridicule, as well as with formidable arguments.

But without entering into this controversy, I will take for granted, that the Uninterrupted Succession, is *essential* ; that it is the only channel through which ministers of the present day can have the Apostolic commission, transmitted to them. Supposing this to be the case, nothing is more easy, than to show, on Presbyterian principles, that the succession in *our church* is as distinct, regular, and unbroken, as that of the *Episcopal church*.

From the time of the Apostles to the æra of the Reformation, *our line of succession* is certainly as good as *theirs*, for they are *one and the same*. When the reformers began their work, they found all the churches of Great-Britain under Episcopal government. Until that time, therefore, our opponents themselves being judges, a regular line of ordinations had been preserved. If there be any doubt of this, it is a doubt which as much affects their succession as our own. In short, until this period, the two lines coincide, share the same fortunes, and are to be traced by the same means. When the Reformation began, and the Popish doctrine of imparity was discarded by a considerable portion of the Christians of Britain, the *Presbyters*, who had been ordained by the *Bishops*, undertook

themselves to ordain in their turn ; and from them it is as easy to trace the succession *in the line of Presbyters*, as it is for our Episcopal brethren to trace it *in the line of diocesan Bishops*. Now if, as we have proved in the foregoing letters, the right of ordination, according to Scripture and primitive usage, belongs to *Presbyters*, it is evident that the succession through *them*, is as valid as any other : or rather, to speak more properly, it is only so far as *any* succession flows through the line of *Presbyters*, that it is either regular or valid. It is the *laying on of the hands of the Presbytery*, that constitutes a scriptural ordination ; and it is because Episcopal Bishops are *Presbyters*, and assisted in all ordinations by *other Presbyters*, that we consider their ordaining acts, on the principles of Scripture and primitive usage, as valid.

I have now presented, within as narrow limits as possible, a sketch of the arguments, by which we support our doctrine of the Christian ministry. Much reasoning, and much testimony which would have served to strengthen our argument, have been necessarily omitted. But enough has been produced to establish the Apostolic and primitive character of our church.

You have seen, that the Scriptures contain but *one commission* for the gospel ministry ; that *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are uniformly used in the New Testament as convertible titles for the same office ; that the same *character* and *powers*, are also in the sacred writings

ascribed interchangeably to *Bishops* and *Presbyters*, thus plainly establishing their identity of *order* as well as of *name*; and that the Christian church was organized by the Apostles, after the model of the Jewish *Synagogue*, which was undoubtedly *Presbyterian* in its form.

You have seen that all the arguments which our Episcopal brethren profess to derive from Scripture in favor of their system, are perfectly nugatory, and do not yield it the least solid support.

You have seen that the *Fathers* of the first two centuries are so far from furnishing a single passage which gives even a semblance of aid to the Episcopal cause, that, like the Scriptures, they every where speak a language wholly inconsistent with it, and favorable only to the doctrine of ministerial parity.

You have seen that the great body of the *Reformers* and other *Witnesses* for the truth, of different ages and nations, with one voice maintained the same doctrine, as taught in Scripture, and in the primitive church; and that even the most conspicuous *English* Reformers, while they assisted in organizing an Episcopal establishment in their own country, defended it on the ground of *human expediency*, and the *will of the magistrate*, rather than that of *divine right*.

You have seen that the church of *England*, and those churches which have immediately descended from her, STAND ABSOLUTELY ALONE, IN THE WHOLE PROTESTANT WORLD, in representing *Bishops* as an order of clergy superior to *Presbyters*; all other Protestants, even those who adopt a sort of



prelacy, having pronounced it to be a mere *human invention*.

You have seen some of the most learned and pious Bishops and other divines of the church of *England*, utterly disclaiming the divine right of diocesan Episcopacy; and declaring that they considered a great majority of the clergy of that church, in later as well as earlier times, as of the same opinion with themselves.

Finally; you have seen that the *gradual introduction* of prelacy, within the first four centuries, was not only *practicable*, but one of the most *natural* and *probable* of all events; and that the most competent judges, and profound inquirers into early history, have pronounced that it actually took place.

After the exhibition of testimony so various, abundant, and explicit, I cannot suppose, my brethren, that any of you can have a remaining doubt. This testimony not only establishes, in the most perfect manner, the *validity* of the ordinations and the ministry of our church; but it goes further, and proves that they are *superior* to those of our Episcopal neighbours; more scriptural, more conformable to primitive usage, and possessing more of that whole character which is fitted to satisfy an humble, simple-hearted, Bible Christian. Be not moved, therefore, when the zealous advocates for the divine right of diocesan Episcopacy charge you with *schism*, for being out of the communion of their church, and denounce your ministry and

ordinances as invalid. After reading the foregoing sheets, I trust you will be prepared to receive such charges and such denunciations, with the same calm, dispassionate, conscious superiority, that you feel when a partizan of the Papacy denounces you for rejecting the supremacy of the *Pope*, and questions the possibility of your salvation out of the church of *Rome*. No, brethren, be not alarmed! there is nothing in their claims to intimidate the most tender conscience; nothing to excite a scruple in the most cautious mind. Let them exhibit, and assert, and reiterate their exclusive pretensions, with all the confidence of zeal, and with all the heat of disputation. Let none of these things move you. You are already in the bosom of a church as nearly conformed to Apostolic order as any on earth. If the testimony of Scripture; if the writings of the Fathers, in the earliest and purest ages of the church; if the weight of numbers, of piety, and of learning, throughout the Protestant world, be of any value, they are clearly on our side. Every successive step that I take in this inquiry, impresses on my mind a deeper conviction of the truth of my principles, and of my obligation to bless God for casting my lot in the Presbyterian church.

But, brethren, while you feel this confidence, let me warn you against being partakers with our opponents in the positiveness and bigotry which *some* of them manifest. I feel much satisfaction in knowing that you generally cherish the most liberal sentiments towards all denominations of Christians; that you

are disposed to embrace as brethren all who give evidence that they love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, however they may differ from you in forms of worship, or in modes of external order. Cultivate to a still higher degree this disposition, so ornamental to your character as Christians, and as members of civil society. Let no provocation on the part of others induce you to abandon it. Remember that you are not yet free from a criminal *bigotry*, if you have not learned to *bear with bigots*. It is a difficult lesson; but we are required to learn it. You will not consider me as framing an apology for error, or as exhorting you to look upon it with approbation. It is your duty to *contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*. But "let us not," to use the language of the amiable *Ganganelli*,—a language more honourable to him than the triple crown—"Let us not lay aside *charity* to maintain *faith*." This is never necessary; and when it is done, is always the effect of that *unhallowed fire* in which our Lord has declared he *has no pleasure*.

Even if our Episcopal brethren were *unanimous* in maintaining and urging the unscriptural claim which has been refuted, we ought to dismiss all bitterness and resentment, and as much as possible, to cherish towards them a spirit of conciliation and respect. But my firm persuasion is, as expressed in a former letter, that scarcely a *twentieth* part of that sect of Christians in the United States, are disposed either to advance or concur in such a claim. It is the delusion of a few only; a delusion which

I have good reason to believe is rejected and reprobated, by the great body of the clergy, as well as the laity of that communion. Let me, then, guard you against the injustice of charging on a whole denomination the odium of such opinions. Impute them to none but those who fasten the charge on themselves, by an open avowal. Convince Episcopalians, by the liberality and candour of your deportment, that you have no prejudices against them as a church. And even convince those who embrace every opportunity of denouncing your ministry and ordinances, that you cannot be *overcome of evil*, but that you know how to *overcome evil with good*.

Numerous are the considerations which press upon us the duty of cultivating peace and love with all denominations of professing Christians. A bold and impious infidelity abounds. We are surrounded with thousands who not only neglect but despise all religion. How will it rejoice the hearts of these enemies of our common faith, to see those who profess to be followers of the same Master, to be animated by the same spirit of love, and to be candidates for the same heaven, either avoiding the society of each other, or coming together only to deal in reciprocal reproaches and anathemas. Be it YOUR study, brethren, whatever others may do, to *give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully*. Let it be apparent to all, that you cherish no dispositions, advance no claims, employ no language, which can reasonably disturb the har-

mony of your intercourse with other Christians. Let it be seen that you know how to esteem those who differ from you, as well as to contend for the truth ; and to cover with the mantle of charity, that which you cannot approve. There is a charm in this conduct, which even infidelity itself cannot resist. It will do more than a thousand carnal weapons to *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, and to “ extort a trembling homage” from those who *know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

The present perturbed state of the world, is another motive to peace and love among Christians. The struggles of ambition, grasping and devouring every thing within its reach ; the desolations of war, widely spread, and murderous beyond former example ; and the prevalence of those selfish and ferocious passions which fill the earth with animosity, hatred, violence, and destruction, all concur with infidelity to call the minds of men away from the truth, and to prevent them from listening to the benign and heavenly voice of religion. Nor is this all. A consideration still more solemn presses itself upon the serious mind. Providence has cast our lot in those *latter days*, which are pre-eminently characterised in Scripture as *perilous times*. Trials are coming on the church, which, were not her King in the midst of her, would appal the stoutest heart. Is this a time for the followers of Christ to be divided ? Is this a time for them to *fall out by the way*, and to *bite and devour one an-*

*ether?* Alas! no. Under these circumstances, how solemn is the call to union and love! In this situation, how obvious is the duty of all who believe the Gospel, to unite in exhibiting our common Christianity to mankind in her meekest, loveliest, and most attractive form! How honorable might not such an example be to religion! how ornamental to the church! how comfortable to ourselves! how useful to our troubled world!

The equal rights and privileges enjoyed in this country, by all sects of Christians, imposes on them an additional obligation to live together in harmony and peace. Our civil government makes no discrimination among churches. In this respect, we all stand upon a level, and are permitted to worship God according to the dictates of our own consciences, having none to molest or to make us afraid. Under these happy circumstances, what temptation is there to cultivate a spirit of bigotry or contention? Why can we not quietly and meekly enjoy our privileges together? Let us prove to the world, that there is something in the spirit of Christianity which enables those who possess it to differ from each other with more mildness, urbanity, and genuine benevolence, than the wrangling politicians around us.

Finally, Christians, remember that the period is hastening on, when all the real followers of Christ shall meet in a more harmonious and a more happy world. Oceans now roll between them; mountains and deserts keep them asunder; and differen-

ces of opinion and denomination, often more inhospitable than the most dreary desert, place at a distance from each other those for whom Christ died. But in that blessed and holy society which you are speedily to join; in that glorified *multitude which no man can number, gathered out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*, these differences will be for ever unknown. There perfect holiness and perfect love shall reign undisturbed and eternal. Let this happy prospect fill you with the tenderest love to all who bear the image of Christ; let it comfort you amidst the contentions and divisions of the present imperfect state; and let it excite you daily to cherish those dispositions which will form the best preparation for that Kingdom where all Christians shall *appear* to each other, what they are in fact, *one body in Christ, and every one members one of another*.

I am, Christian Brethren,

Your affectionate Pastor,

SAMUEL MILLER.

